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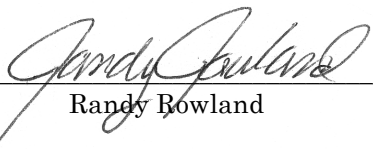
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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
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STRENGTHENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD:
A TRAINING STRATEGY FOR ADULT LEADERS
TO PRACTICE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

A MINISTRY FOCUS PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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SCOTT LOO
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ABSTRACT

Strengthening Our Relationship with God: A Training Strategy for Adult Leaders to Practice Spiritual Exercises

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2018

Spiritual exercises are valuable practices that come to us through Scripture and Christian tradition. However, these practices have been lost to our own church at a time when perhaps we most need them. Our church, the Great Exchange Covenant Church (GrX) is in the Silicon Valley of California. Our context is marked by innovative technology, creativity and imagination. It is also marked by over-achievement, competition, financial pressure and a pervasive feeling of anxiety. People are overly-busy, pressured and worried, leading to lives of restlessness and frantic activity. The result is a profound disconnection from God, from others and even from a sense of oneself.

In response to the challenges facing the GrX church community and to counter the frenetic culture of Silicon Valley, this doctoral project will seek to help the adult leaders of GrX strengthen their relationship with God, others and themselves through the spiritual exercises of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest. Spiritual practices found in Scripture and in Christian tradition can be rediscovered. They can also be reimagined to engage the hearts and minds of believers in Silicon Valley who seek to live faithfully amidst this culture.

Part One explores the ministry context and challenges of the people at GrX. Part Two consists of a literature review, engaging the topic of spiritual practices and the need for adults to engage in these practices. Part Two also offers theological reflection and explores more deeply the specific practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest. Part Three delineates the goals and plans for a ministry program focused on spiritual exercises. Part Three also contains the implementation strategy of the ministry program then concludes with an overall program assessment to see if the practice of spiritual exercises helps strengthen one's connection with God, others and oneself.

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To Evelyn

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Psalms 46:10 declares, “Be still, and know that I am God.”¹ These seven words are easy to remember and profoundly challenging to live. I am a busy pastor serving a church full of busy people. We are surrounded by a busy culture. To know God and to live as a follower of Jesus are high values in our church community. However, to “be still” is a foreign concept and practice.

When Isaiah sees the LORD, high and lifted up in the temple, he confesses, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Is 6:5). Sometimes I feel like Isaiah. I am a pastor with an overly crowded calendar, and I dwell in the midst of a people with overly overcrowded calendars. Like Isaiah, we are lost.

By lost, I mean we are lost and disconnected from our relationship with God. We are disoriented in our Christian life by our frantic activity. Our attempts to know God are undermined by the busyness we live.

Our church is the Great Exchange Covenant Church (GrX) located in Santa Clara, California. We live in the San Francisco Bay Area. We dwell in the midst of some of the world’s most innovative companies like Facebook, LinkedIn, Cisco and Apple. The area is commonly known as Silicon Valley. The pace of life is fast. The pressure is high. Competition in the market place between companies is fierce. At times, even competition within companies between co-workers is fierce. The culture of Silicon Valley leads to

¹ *ESV Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

incredibly long work hours and a technologically connected work week that runs twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

In conversations with men and women in our church, it is common to hear struggles with busyness and stress. Everyone is too busy. Time feels compressed. There is precious little time to connect with God, with others, or even with one's own soul.

To counter the overly-busy culture of Silicon Valley, this project will help the adult leaders of Great Exchange Covenant Church to strengthen their relationship with God through the spiritual exercises of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest. As we more deeply abide in God, we will expand our capacity to authentically connect with others and ourselves. The adult leaders at GrX are a strategic demographic to invest in and to disciple. They are not only leaders in the church, but are also leaders in their families and in their workplaces. Jesus Christ chose a specific group of disciples to lead and teach. From Jesus's example, this project will focus on a small group of adult leaders within GrX, specifically the men and women who have been elected to the Leadership Team.

The practice of spiritual exercise is the key component for this project and needful for individuals to strengthen their relationship with God. For this endeavor, it is not enough to simply know information. In order to grow and become stronger, practice and exercise are essential. Someone does not become strong as an endurance runner by simply knowing the techniques of running. Nor is it enough to know that running may be good for health. In order to run with endurance, one must get out and run.

It is also important to exercise with intentionality. Just as an endurance runner strategically exercises by stretching, lifting weights and running for increasingly

measured distances, the disciple of Jesus practices specific spiritual exercises. From Scripture and from Christian tradition, there are many spiritual exercises that draw people more deeply into relationship with God. For this project, the spiritual exercises which will be studied are solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest.

Solitude is to come away from all of the activity of daily life. It is intentional movement away from the tasks and the people we are responsible for. We enter solitude, not in any sense to abandon our responsibilities or the people we love. Rather, solitude is a pause, from which we later emerge and return to our tasks and our loves with a renewed energy and purpose. Solitude contains the added benefit of quieting the noise that surrounds us by removing us from the cacophony of activity and input calling for our attention.

While solitude quiets the outside, silence quiets the inside. Silence is the intentional decision to cease from using one's voice. There is much power in the voice. The voice is used to teach, direct, command and request. The voice can create and build up. The voice can damage and tear down. Silence creates a posture of surrender. In silence, one discovers it is more difficult to be defensive and self-justify. It is in silence that our own voice becomes quiet and God's voice becomes more discernable.

Prayer is our connection with God, a conversation that contains both speaking and listening. In our busy, noisy and chatty society, the danger is that our prayers take on a similar quality. Often, prayer is thought of as making requests of God (prayer requests) or giving praise to God (worship). However, little of our prayer time is spent in active listening. Silence quiets the inside such that we might have the space in our own souls to hear God's voice. Prayer that emerges from silence recognizes that to deepen one's

relationship with God, listening to God is required. In prayer that listens to God, one discovers the God of love, forgiveness and peace.

Study is a spiritual exercise that focuses the mind. Modern culture, consumerism and advertising constantly compete for our attention. There is so much activity and stimulation in the surrounding culture, it is often difficult to hear one think. Thoughts become distracted. Focus becomes dissipated. To “love the Lord your God ... with all your mind” calls us to discipline our thought-life and direct our intellect toward the person and matters of God (Mt 22:37). Study cultivates attentiveness and enhances our capacity to be attentive to God, others and ourselves.

Rest is expressed through intentionally ceasing from busyness and activity. In Scripture, rest comes in the form of observing the Sabbath. Sabbath is one of God’s commands, yet, in our busy Silicon Valley culture, Sabbath rest is a command that is regularly disregarded. Rest is for our benefit and reminds us we were not made to work ceaselessly like machines. To be human is to rest. Rest calls humanity to rely on God’s provision rather than one’s own capacity for work. However, rest has become a forgotten practice. The value of rest has been subsumed by the value of productivity. The need for rest has been replaced by the need for coffee. The motivation for rest has been replaced by the fear of losing jobs or market share or competitive advantage.

This writing project is framed in three parts. Part One is a description of the community context of Silicon Valley and the ministry context of GrX Church. Part Two encompasses theological reflection on spiritual exercises, engaging literature and Scripture. Part Three contains the ministry practice, the plans and proposals for adult leaders to engage in the practice of spiritual exercises.

Part One contains Chapter 1 which introduces the ministry challenge and the ministry context of the Great Exchange Covenant Church (GrX). The ministry challenge we face is that we live in one of the most technologically connected locations in the world, yet we are profoundly disconnected from God, each other and even ourselves. The community context is the fast-paced, competitive, stressful, consumer-driven, entertainment-oriented and distracted culture of Silicon Valley. We are scientists and engineers who excel at crunching numbers and writing code for apps, yet who struggle with emotional maturity, building healthy relationships or simply knowing ourselves. Within the ministry context of GrX, there is an elected Leadership Team who is charged with the spiritual oversight of the church. Leadership Team Members serve a two-year term. The two-year term is a commitment to this small group of leaders and forms an ideal community wherein training can take place, training in the practice of spiritual disciplines in order to deepen one's relationship with God.

Part Two, theological reflection, contains Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 is the literature review. Classic texts on spiritual practice such as Thomas A Kempis's, *The Imitation of Christ* will be considered as will more modern writing like Dallas Willard's, *The Divine Conspiracy* and James Bryan Smith's, *The Good and Beautiful God*. The literature review will highlight work for the topic of general spiritual practices and the more specific practices of silence, solitude, prayer, study and rest. John Wooden's, *Wooden on Leadership*, provides insight about the basic need for successful adults to practice with intentionality, focus and purpose.

Chapter 3 offers theological reflection on the spiritual practices. This chapter will begin with an exploration of spiritual practices in general, desired outcomes, potential

obstacles and examples from history. Spiritual practices will be considered in the Old and New Testaments. The theological reflection chapter will also focus on each spiritual exercise (solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest), how each uniquely strengthens one's relationship with God and how each contains unique challenges.

Part Three, Ministry Practice, consists of Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 of Part Three will deal with the actual ministry plans of the project. This chapter begins with recognizing the overarching goals for the participants. Next the components of the ministry plan will be described. The program will also consist of avenues for reflection by participants to measure their own, personal growth.

Chapter 5 will discuss the ministry program implementation and assessment. The program implementation will be church-wide and focus on the key church leaders of the Leadership Team. The program assessment will be in two parts: an initial assessment immediately after completion of the ministry program and a second program assessment, six months after the ministry program to see if there are longer lasting effects, continuance of spiritual practices, real change and transformation in the lives of participants.

The response to an overly busy calendar and an overly stressed life is to create space for less. In this space for less, certainly fewer tasks will be accomplished. It is like going away for a vacation, where space is created for less work to be done and fewer chores to be completed. In the space which quiets all of the noise of busyness and activity is the place of learning to listen and of reconnection with God.

Hearing God in the quiet is reminiscent of Elijah's encounter. God is not present in the great wind, earthquake or fire. God catches Elijah's attention though a whisper.

God says to the prophet,

“Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of *a low whisper [or a sound, a thin silence]*. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kgs 19:11b-13)

Elijah was lost. He was not too dissimilar to all of us who are lost in the forest of busyness, activity and noise. The question God asks of Elijah can easily be asked of us.

“What are we doing here?” One faithful response, as followers of Jesus, is to pray, “God, what do you want me to be doing here?” It is my hope that as we practice the spiritual exercises of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest, we will have the ears to hear God's answer, receive guidance for our lives and find deeper connection with God, others and ourselves.

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY AND MINISTRY CONTEXT

“Innovate or die.”¹ This is a well-known maxim in Silicon Valley. It captures the spirit and culture of the technology industry. It also belies a fear. Because of the demand to innovate and the fear of becoming obsolete, people in Silicon Valley are driven to work tremendous numbers of hours in the San Francisco Bay Area.

According to data on the thirty largest cities in the United States, a study “compiled by New York’s comptroller and posted by Capital New York” showed people who work in San Francisco have the longest workdays at “44 hours a week.”² The study also showed “nearly 4.6 hours” of commute time each week, bringing the total of work and commute hours to “nearly 49 hours per week.”³

With Silicon Valley located in the southern part of the San Francisco Bay Area, the statistics for the longest work week are not surprising. The expectation for many

¹ Conversations with several tech company employees. The direct quotation comes from one electrical engineer, computer scientist who has been working in Silicon Valley for more than 30 years.

² Jahna Berry, “San Francisco among U.S. cities where employees work the most hours,” San Francisco Business Times (May 24, 2015), under “Technology” <https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/blog/2015/03/san-francisco-cities-employees-work-commute-sf-ny.html> (accessed November 22, 2017).

³ Ibid.

specifically in the tech industry is to work even longer hours than these. It is not uncommon for the expected workweek to be fifty-five to sixty hours minimum.⁴ In Silicon Valley, an environment where everyone is considered bright and creative, getting ahead means out-working the next person, the next team or the next company. It is a prevalent belief that “hard work is a prerequisite for success.”⁵

The pressure for tech employees to work long hours comes not only from the drive to succeed, but also from the desire to belong. Sometimes managers tell their employees they do not belong on the team or in the industry if they are unwilling to work a relentless schedule. While managers do not explicitly demand long work hours, employees who are unwilling to work the “10-14 hour work days” are “denied promotions or are seen as ‘not being cultural fits’ or ‘not being committed or passionate.’”⁶ The tech worker who wants a fifty hour work week in order to spend time with family would reveal a tech worker who is not “‘cut out’ for the industry.”⁷

In addition to the demand for long hours, job instability and high turn-over in tech companies contribute to a stressful work environment and to stress in the church community. According to *Business Insider*, the retention at the ten largest tech companies

⁴ Joscelin Cooper, “Why Silicon Valley's Work Culture Is Killing Us,” *Forbes* (August 25, 2013), under “Entrepreneurs,” <https://www.forbes.com/sites/groupthink/2013/08/25/why-silicon-valleys-work-culture-is-killing-us/#1d84a9ac4db6> (accessed November 22, 2017).

⁵ Nitasha Tiku, “The Gospel of Hard Work, According to Silicon Valley,” *Wired* (June 30, 2017) under “Business,” <https://www.wired.com/2017/06/silicon-valley-still-doesnt-care-work-life-balance/> (accessed November 22, 2017).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

is around two years.⁸ Some of this high churn rate is caused by how tech employees are vested with stock options. Companies will typically allow employees to be vested after two years. Additional stock options become available for employees after four years. These vesting periods of every two years create natural break points for employees to explore other employment opportunities. The constant turnover of employees, however, also creates stress on the work teams and employees who are left. Job responsibilities need to be reassigned and new co-workers are constantly being added to companies. While the benefit of new employees is new ideas or creative energy, the cost of high turnover is the anxiety caused by instability.

Acquisitions and mergers are another form of stress in the culture of Silicon Valley. In 2016, of the 150 largest tech companies in Silicon Valley, eighteen companies became acquisition targets.⁹ \$87.4 billion dollars-worth of companies were bought and sold in one year alone. For every company that was an acquisition target and for every company that was the purchaser, there is uncertainty in the workforce. With acquisitions comes the merging of teams and the elimination of redundancy. The most lucrative product lines, the most essential departments and the most productive workers are retained. The rest are let go. “Innovate or die” drives the culture forward and drives the workers to increased busyness.

⁸ Becky Peterson, “Travis Kalanick lasted in his role for 6.5 years — five times longer than the average Uber employee,” Business Insider (August 20, 2017) under “Tech Insider,” <http://www.businessinsider.com/employee-retention-rate-top-tech-companies-2017-8> (accessed November 27, 2017).

⁹ Rex Crum, “Let’s make a deal: SV150 firms spent \$41 billion on acquisitions in 2016,” The Mercury News (May 1, 2017) under “Business – Technology,” <http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/05/01/lets-make-a-deal-acquisitions-were-all-over-the-sv150-in-2016/> (accessed November 29, 2017).

Housing prices add to the financial stress many experience in Silicon Valley. According to a regional news group, *The Mercury News*, the “median 20 percent down payment on a house in metro San Jose is \$192,320. Give or take a few bucks, that sum is equal to the median nationwide value of an entire house: \$192,500.”¹⁰ The cost of home ownership in the Silicon Valley context is \$961,600 compared to \$192,500 across the United States. Certainly incomes in Silicon Valley are higher than in other areas of the United States. However, the larger Silicon Valley incomes are not proportionally higher relative to housing costs. The average home buyer in the Silicon Valley area (the San Jose metro area and Santa Clara County) needs 182 percent of their annual income for a 20 percent down payment. By contrast, the average home buyer in the United States needs only 67 percent of their income for a 20 percent down payment.¹¹

According to an article by the US Census Bureau in 2006, people who spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing and housing related expenses are considered “housing-cost burden(ed)... Housing expenditures that exceed 30 percent of household income have historically been viewed as an indicator of a housing affordability problem.”¹² There are some in our church community whose housing expenditures are at 50 percent of household income. The mortgage burden is real and contributes to stress. Because there is little financial margin, the fear of losing one’s job is closely tied to the

¹⁰ Richard Scheinin, “A Silicon Valley Down Payment Could Buy You an Entire House in Much of the U.S,” *The Mercury News* (January 16, 2017, Updated: March 1, 2017) under “Business Real Estate,” <http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/01/16/a-silicon-valley-down-payment-could-buy-you-an-entire-house-in-much-of-the-u-s/> (accessed November 22, 2017).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mary Schwartz and Ellen Wilson. “Who Can Afford To Live in a Home?: A look at data from the 2006 American Community Survey,” US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/housing/census/publications/who-can-afford.pdf> (accessed November 22, 2017).

fear of losing one's home. While some have chosen to downsize and live in much smaller accommodations, others have chosen more creative housing arrangements, living with friends or extended family. These solutions have helped relieve the financial stress on individuals and families in our church, though in some cases, living in small spaces or in closer proximity with others has created new burdens.

Another aspect of the community context is the ubiquitous electronic device. Be it a smartphone, smart watch, tablet or laptop, people are constantly connected to their devices and often consuming some form of social media or entertainment. In the place that designs and creates cutting edge, popular and useable technology, it is no surprise that this same technology dominates the landscape. What is striking is how quickly the consumption of digital media has grown.

According to a *Total Audience Report* by Nielsen in 2016, "U.S. adults spent 10 hours, 39 minutes a day consuming media in the first quarter of 2016. That's up a full hour from the first quarter of 2015 ... mostly due to smartphone use, which has soared 37 minutes, and tablet use, which has increased 12 minutes."¹³ Electronic devices are increasingly being used to consume media. The apps on these devices are the vehicle by which entertainment is delivered. In a study focusing on app usage in 2014, Nielson found,

... the emergence of the entertainment categories is a contributor to the overall increase in app usage. In fact, not only has the entertainment category seen a 13% increase in unique audience year-over-year as of fourth-quarter 2014, but this audience is spending nearly three hours more on apps over the same period—a

¹³ Jason Lynch, "U.S. Adults Consume an Entire Hour More of Media Per Day Than They Did Just Last Year," Adweek (June 27, 2016) under "TV/Video," <http://www.adweek.com/tv-video/us-adults-consume-entire-hour-more-media-day-they-did-just-last-year-172218/#/> (accessed November 29, 2017).

26% growth!... [T]he monthly time spent per person has increased from 23 hours and two minutes in fourth-quarter 2012 to 37 hours and 28 minutes in fourth-quarter 2014—a 63% rise in two years!¹⁴

Electronic devices and the apps that run on them are increasingly being used for entertainment at an astonishing rate. Nielsen found “when it comes to smartphone usage, the gaming entertainment subcategory is the biggest draw.... 76% of entertainment app users... played at least one game in fourth-quarter 2014.... Music is the second most popular subcategory.”¹⁵ Video and movie viewing through apps also grew substantially.¹⁶

The ministry context of Great Exchange Covenant Church (GrX) is within this larger community context of Silicon Valley. Planted in 2002, GrX was established with the hope of ministering to the people of the San Francisco Bay Area. Originally, the target audience of GrX was young, single, professional people. The approach was based on an “attractional model” for church growth. The Sunday morning worship service was to be excellent and attractive. It was understood as a production and received the greatest energy and attention. As one former worship leader shared, “It was all about the show.”¹⁷ The planting leadership was largely Asian American; and other young, Asian American Christian professionals were attracted to the church community.

In the early years, Great Exchange Covenant Church experienced tremendous growth. It became known by the abbreviation, “GrX,” a fittingly hip and trendy

¹⁴ Nielsen Company, “So Many Apps, So Much More Time for Entertainment,” Nielsen (June 11, 2015) under “Insights Newswire Digital,” <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2015/so-many-apps-so-much-more-time-for-entertainment.html> (accessed November 29, 2017).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ In a conversation with a GrX worship leader who shall remain anonymous, 2014.

nomenclature, for it was rapidly becoming the hip and trendy place to be in the South Bay among Asian American singles. By the numbers, GrX grew to 100 people in its first year, doubled in its second then doubled again by its fourth year. It was recognized by the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination as one of its top ten, fastest growing churches in the US.¹⁸

Staff was rapidly added to the church during this season of growth. The founding pastor, who was by now the Senior Pastor, believed in staffing for the future, adding twelve positions in 2007. Associate Pastors were brought in to oversee various aspects of ministry such as small groups, worship and college ministry to the local university. The church reached its zenith in population during 2008, when about 900 people worshiped at GrX in two Sunday morning services.

From the outside, the community seemed to be thriving. From the inside, another story was unfolding. While the church had been initially established to reach the 92 percent of the un-churched in the Silicon Valley, the vast majority of the growth of GrX came from the smaller, surrounding Asian American Christian Churches. GrX was the only church that had a critical mass of Asian American, Christian singles in the area. Many of the Christians in this demographic were leaving their home churches to meet and mingle with others at GrX.

The leadership style was top-down. This created an incredible level of clarity and focus, two essential elements for any church plant. A major focus was church growth and the primary tool for measuring this was to use attendance metrics. Numbers such as

¹⁸ Ibid.

Sunday attendance and small group participation were regularly reviewed during staff meetings. Associate pastors and staff over particular areas of ministry were expected to reach their metrics or target numbers, much the same way that sales people in the surrounding tech companies were expected to hit their sales targets by the end of each quarter. Some questions began to emerge about this strategy.

A seminal event in the life of the church was a multi-year, fund raising campaign. The goal was to raise millions of dollars for a building GrX could call home. GrX had been a mobile church, using various venues from hotel convention space to school auditoriums to hold worship services. Two other elements of the campaign were to plant other GrX churches in the San Francisco Bay Area and to also support international ministries. GrX planted three churches (San Francisco in 2005, Fremont in 2006 and San Jose in 2008), and also invested deeply into three international ministry partnerships.

However, the plans for a building never came to fruition. In 2008, internal difficulties began to emerge and a transition in pastoral leadership was initiated. This was a difficult season for the church community and predictably, many people began to leave.

From 2010-2013, the church experienced great transition. The remaining associate pastors and staff did a courageous and remarkable job in serving the church during this time. GrX also received an Interim Senior Pastor from the denomination for eighteen months, who did much to love and stabilize the community. After nearly a two and a half year search process, I was invited to be the Lead Pastor of GrX in 2013. It is the first time this faith community has ever collectively called a pastor.

As of 2017, the church has stabilized and is experiencing growth in mission and fellowship.¹⁹ The demographics of the church at first glance appear mono-cultural. GrX is a community of about 180 people, 95 percent Asian and 90 percent young families. There are seventy children under the age of ten and no retirees. About 85 percent of the adults are working professionals with some form of advanced degree. Most are working in the technology industry of Silicon Valley or working for tech companies in non-tech jobs.

For the young families in GrX, the parents are particularly busy. Alongside a punishing work schedule, adults are caring for babies, toddlers or young children. There are activities such as music lessons, sports teams and language lessons on Saturdays. Some have extensive family commitments as well, while others have aging parents staying with them. It would not be unusual for children under the age of five to be in some form of pre-school from seven am to five pm, Monday through Friday. Calendars are packed with many good things beyond work. However, the overall busyness contributes to the sense of being dissipated and running from activity to activity without space to rest or margin to pause.

At first glance, GrX appears to be a church filled with the Asian American stereotype of the model-minority, where people were highly successful in academics, then went on to be highly successful in the marketplace. On closer inspection, the GrX community is diverse across the Asian spectrum. Some are first generation people (born outside the US) who have immigrated to the US as adults. Some are Green Card holders. At the other

¹⁹ Great Exchange Covenant Church, *Trend Analysis Report 2017-2018* (Santa Clara: Great Exchange Covenant Church, November 7, 2017).

end of the immigration spectrum, some people are fourth or fifth generation, whose families have been in the US so long, there is no connection to Asia. Ethnically, we have members of GrX who are Caucasian, Latino and African American in addition to our Asian American majority.

The culture of Silicon Valley is perhaps the most significant force acting on and influencing the people of GrX. Technology and the desire to have the latest and greatest electronic device are pervasive. We recently held an all-church retreat at a beautiful location in the mountains surrounded by redwood trees. There was no mobile phone connection and many people were visibly disoriented on our first evening together. However, by the final day of our three day retreat, people celebrated the lack of mobile coverage because it afforded them the space to connect with others and to truly rest.

The GrX church community also struggles with the issues of comparison, competition and compensation. The temptation to compare oneself and one's situation to others is strong and often results in feelings of inferiority or disadvantage. Competition and the underlying fear that one's company may be acquired or one's jobs may be lost with very little notice adds to a sense of fear and instability. And finally, compensation is an issue for many in our church. While the San Francisco Bay Area has some of the highest salaries, it is also one of the most expensive places to live due to the highly inflated housing prices. All these issues create elevated levels of stress, tremendous hours of work and precious little time to connect with God.

The people of GrX are creative, intelligent, hardworking and achievement oriented. There is excellence in work and generosity toward the church. While there are areas of growth such as emotional wholeness or relational maturity, the biggest challenge

facing the people of GrX is disconnection. Because of the busyness of the surrounding culture and the extensive commitment to work, people are disconnected from God, from others and even from themselves.

GrX is led by a Leadership Team, staff and key volunteers. While the final authority for all matters of the church resides with the congregation, the Leadership Team is the equivalent of a church board, exercising oversight and policy governance. The staff is made up of six paid individuals responsible for different ministries within the church such as worship or children's ministries. Two are full-time and four are part-time. Key volunteers lead the Life Groups (small groups) and mission initiatives.

The focus group for this doctoral project and for the practice of spiritual disciplines is the Leadership Team of GrX. The Leadership Team is a group of five to nine people who are elected by the church partners of GrX. The GrX Partners are the official members of the church, men and women who have attended the Partnership Class, been interviewed by the Partnership Committee and made a commitment to join in the community and mission of GrX.

The Leadership Team is elected every year at the Annual Meeting of GrX. Candidates for the Leadership Team have been selected and interviewed by the GrX Nominating Committee. A Candidate may be "any partner of the church meeting the biblical standards of character and giftedness for church leaders."²⁰ Before the Annual Meeting, these names also come before the sitting, current Leadership Team for review.

²⁰ Great Exchange Covenant Church, *Great Exchange Covenant Church Bylaws* Article II: Leadership Team, Section 3: Qualifications (Santa Clara: Great Exchange Covenant Church, September 2015).

Each person elected to the Leadership Team serves a two-year term. Upon completion of the two-year term, a member may be elected to serve a second, two-year term. No person may be elected to more than two consecutive, two-year terms. The Lead Pastor of GrX also serves on the Leadership Team as an ex officio member.

According to the GrX Bylaws, the Leadership Team “shall be responsible for building, maintaining and overseeing the spiritual welfare of the congregation and for directing and overseeing all ministries and business affairs of the church.”²¹ The Leadership Team is also responsible for the governance and the budget of GrX.

The Leadership Team agrees to be bound by a “behavioral covenant” which outlines the manner in which members shall conduct themselves. Some of these commitments are: “We promise to value each other as gifts from God and will always seek to be in a harmonious and respectful relationship with each other” and “We promise to lead by following the example of Christ.”²² The behavioral covenant establishes the norms by which Leadership Team members will relate to each other. The behavioral covenant centers the motivation of our actions in Scripture. The covenant is also hopeful and aspirational as each member seeks to follow the example of Christ.

The Leadership Team and the two-year term of each Leadership Team member can create an intentional community for discipleship. This project casts a new vision for the Leadership Team to be more than a body responsible for governance, oversight and the budget. The Leadership Team can become a means of Christian formation,

²¹ Great Exchange Covenant Church, *Great Exchange Covenant Church Bylaws* Article II: Leadership Team, Section 1: Purpose (Santa Clara: Great Exchange Covenant Church, September 2015).

²² Great Exchange Covenant Church, *Behavioral Covenant* (Santa Clara: Great Exchange Covenant Church, September 2015-2016).

strengthening each person's relationship with God, others and themselves. By God's grace, and through the practice of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest, we will become more of what God endeavors us to be.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will examine seven books that are foundational for this project and engage the topic of spiritual exercises. The first two books, while written 500 years apart, both advocate for the need for spiritual practices and offer a consideration of spiritual exercises in general. The next four books examine more closely, the specific exercises of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest. The final book, written by a basketball coach, presents the importance of practicing with intentionality and purpose.

The Imitation of Christ by Thomas À Kempis

In the early fifteenth century, Thomas À Kempis (1380-1471) wrote *The Imitation of Christ*. The work is divided into four books: Counsels on the Spiritual Life, Counsels on the Inner Life, On Inward Consolation and On the Blessed Sacraments. The themes of Book One include humility, reading Scripture, vanity, obedience, discipline truth, silence, divine consolation, peace, adversity and temptations. Book Two focuses on “the inner life.” À Kempis writes, “Learn to turn from worldly things, and give yourself to spiritual

things, and you will see that Kingdom of God come within you.”¹ Book Three is the longest and focuses on “inward consolation.” Having dealt with our inner life, À Kempis gives guidance in finding peace in God alone. Book Four is primarily on the Sacrament of Communion.

At the beginning of Book One, À Kempis writes, “Christ counsels us to follow His life and way if we desire true enlightenment and freedom from all blindness of heart. Let the life of Jesus Christ, then, be our first consideration.”² Guarding against a theology that touches only the mind, but misses the heart, À Kempis notes, “I would far rather feel contrition, than be able to define it.”³ Humility, and not knowledge, is the key to developing the spiritual life.⁴ “A humble knowledge of oneself,” writes À Kempis, “is a surer road to God than a deep searching of the sciences.”⁵

The Imitation of Christ reads like a devotional work giving instruction in the spiritual life. À Kempis urges readers to think deeply, live practically and prioritize the well-being of one’s soul. He writes, “The spiritual man puts the care of his soul before all else; and whoever diligently attend to his own affairs is ready to keep silent about others.”⁶

¹ Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (London: Penguin Books, 1952), 67.

² Ibid., 27.

³ Ibid.

⁴ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 19.

⁵ À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 31.

⁶ Ibid., 73.

Spiritual exercises are scattered throughout *The Imitation of Christ*. In Chapter 20, “On the Love of Solitude and Silence,” À Kempis instructs, “Choose a suitable time for recollection and frequently consider the loving-kindness of God. If you avoid unnecessary talk and aimless visits... you will find plenty of suitable time to spend in meditation on holy things.... No man can safely speak unless he who would gladly remain silent.”⁷

The Imitation of Christ is a book of profound depth, insight and quality. It offers perspective and guidance from over 500 years ago that is relevant and practical for today. The key for À Kempis is to take the time to consider God. In the busy, modern world, surrounded by time saving devices, time seems to be a most scarce resource.

Good and Beautiful God
by James Bryan Smith

The Good and Beautiful God by James Bryan Smith is the first of three books in a series which “form a ‘curriculum for Christlikeness.’”⁸ The other two books are titled *The Good and Beautiful Life* and *The Good and Beautiful Community*. For Smith, the goal and hope is for readers to be formed into the character and likeness of Jesus Christ through changed beliefs and changed habits.

Smith recognizes that every person carries a series of stories or narratives. These narratives form the basis for our beliefs about the world, people, ourselves and even God. Having true narratives about God is key to becoming like Jesus. Each chapter in *The*

⁷ Ibid., 50-51.

⁸ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 14.

Good and Beautiful God looks at one attribute of God such as “God is Good” or “God is Generous.” Smith opens each chapter by naming false narratives or false beliefs that people may carry about God. He then looks at Scripture and explores the narratives given to us by Jesus, seeking to replace false narratives with true ones.

With each chapter, Smith includes a “Soul Training Exercise.” To create lasting change and growth, it is not enough to simply know what is true. Smith advocates for doing exercises that will also shape people to become more like Christ. For example, in Chapter Three, “God is Trustworthy,” he offers the exercise entitled “Counting Your Blessings.”⁹ Smith writes, “Counting your blessings is a powerful spiritual exercise. Make a list of all of the things God has blessed you with, all of the things that make life wonderful. Pay attention to the details of your life...include things that God has done for you. Each day God is at work providing for us, even though we cannot always see it. This exercise is aimed at helping you see...”¹⁰ The exercise, however is a means to a much larger life change. Smith adds, “I hope that this listing exercise will not be just a one-time exercise, but a new, ongoing habit that turns into a lifestyle.”¹¹

Reflection questions are also included at the close of each chapter. The questions cause one to evaluate the challenges and successes of the particular spiritual exercise as well as discover any learning about God or self. While the exercises and reflections may be done individually, Smith has designed the material to be used with others in the

⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 72.

context of community. Smith explains, “[R]eflection and dialogue with others who are on the same path, all under the leading of the Holy Spirit” are elements of transformation.¹²

His emphasis on soul training is what seems strikingly valuable about this book and this series. Smith recognizes that change is difficult. He writes,

We cannot change simply by saying, “I want to change.” We have to examine what we think (our narratives) and how we practice (the spiritual disciplines) and who we are interacting with (our social context). If we change those things—and we can—then change will come naturally to us. This is why Jesus said his “yoke” was easy. If we think the things he thought, do the things he did and spend time with likeminded people, we will become like him, and it will not be difficult.¹³

It is also not enough to simply know what is true or what must be done. Transformation does not occur by sheer will power. Right knowing must be accompanied by right practice.

The Way of the Heart
by Henri Nouwen

Looking to the Desert Fathers and Desert Mothers for wisdom, Henri Nouwen explores the specific spiritual exercises of solitude, silence and prayer.¹⁴ Nouwen introduces several searching questions which are relevant to pastoral ministry, and which can be extended to the ministry of leadership by the GrX Leadership Team. “How can we expect to remain full of creative vitality, of zeal for the Word of God, of desire to serve, and of motivation to inspire our often numbed congregations? Where are we supposed to

¹² Ibid., 24.

¹³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 8.

find nurture and strength? How can we alleviate our own spiritual hunger and thirst?”¹⁵

The invitation to come away in solitude, silence and prayer is the answer to these questions. The call to these spiritual practices is set against the reality of our culture, which is more soul destructive than soul affirming.¹⁶ Nouwen observes, “Our society is not a community radiant with the love of Christ, but a dangerous network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul.”¹⁷ Nouwen seeks to invite us back to experience this radiant love of Christ.

Surrounded by the busyness of demands as a husband, father and pastor, I welcome times of solitude to realign my soul with God.¹⁸ Nouwen is right in saying, through solitude we get rid of all of our scaffolding, with nothing to entertain or distract us.¹⁹ We enter into a frightening nothingness that may cause us to question our self-worth apart from activity and others or battle in our minds with thoughts, images, ideas and fantasies that are deeply embedded in us. “The wisdom of the desert is that the confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁰ “In a world that victimizes us by its compulsions, we are called to solitude where we can struggle against our anger and

¹⁵ Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), 12-13.

¹⁶ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 8.

¹⁷ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 21.

¹⁸ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 8.

¹⁹ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

greed and let our new self be born in the loving encounter with Jesus Christ.”²¹

After exploring solitude, Nouwen turns to silence, seeing it as “an indispensable discipline in the spiritual life.”²² When I have taken days or intentional hours of silence, I have found as Nouwen writes, that “silence teaches us to speak.”²³ Here, he makes an important distinction about the type of silence which is most edifying.²⁴ He writes, that we learn to speak from silence “when the silence from which the word comes forth is not emptiness and absence, but fullness and presence, not the human silence of embarrassment, shame, guilt, but the divine silence in which love rests secure.”²⁵ Far too often, people speak from places of insecurity rather than from the divine silence rooted in love.

Finally, Nouwen considers the topic of prayer. “Solitude and silence can never be separated from the call to unceasing prayer.... The Desert Fathers did not think of solitude as being alone, but as being alone with God. They did not think of silence as not speaking, but as listening to God. Solitude and silence are the context within which prayer is practiced.”²⁶ Prayer is simply being in the presence of God fully and honestly as

²¹ Ibid., 39-40.

²² Ibid., 44.

²³ Ibid., 56.

²⁴ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 15.

²⁵ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 56.

²⁶ Ibid., 69.

oneself.²⁷ Nouwen observes the “prayer of the heart challenges us to hide absolutely nothing from God and to surrender ourselves unconditionally to his mercy. Thus the prayer of the heart is the prayer of truth.”²⁸

In summary, Nouwen concludes, "Solitude shows us the way to let our behavior be shaped not by the compulsions of the world but by our new mind, the mind of Christ. Silence prevents us from being suffocated by our wordy world and teaches us to speak the Word of God. Finally, unceasing prayer gives solitude and silence their real meaning. In unceasing prayer, we descend with the mind into the heart. Thus we enter through our heart into the heart of God, who embraces all of history with his eternally creative and re-creative love."²⁹

This simple encapsulation of solitude, silence and prayer prompts me to participate in these disciplines. I am also encouraged to lead others in the same. Our church community is deeply immersed in the culture of work, technology and entertainment. There is a busyness that comes from too many activities, but a lack of real depth of engagement or relationship. I believe people in our church are afraid to be alone with themselves. The constant activity or entertainment around them, allows them to avoid confronting themselves and any darkness they fear may be lingering within. I think many in our church would be afraid of Nouwen's “prayer of truth.” I think others are afraid of loneliness. The challenge is to guide people to the understanding that they are

²⁷ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 22.

²⁸ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 79.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 91-2.

not alone. In solitude they are alone with God. And the truth they will encounter is truth enveloped in unconditional love for the true person they are.³⁰

The Divine Conspiracy
by Dallas Willard

Dallas Willard's *The Divine Conspiracy* invites readers to deepen one's personal journey and relationship with God in a way that is thought-provoking, practical and personal. Willard presents the compelling position that God has given people the opportunity to live the promise of eternal life in the here and now. "One is blessed," writes Willard, "based upon acceptance and intimate interactions with what God is doing in human history. Such people are in the present kingdom of the heavens."³¹ The heart of the kingdom is *agape* love. The disciples of Jesus are citizens of God's kingdom, and therefore can live with a "wholeness, of full functionality, that he has."³²

Willard's writing is an elegant invitation into reflection on the human condition, the Holy Spirit and the heart of God. He engages the heart, the mind and the body through the stories, theology and practical spiritual exercises. In his discussion of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5-7, Willard underscores the belief that eternal life begins now.

The aim of the Sermon—forcefully indicated by its concluding verses—is to help people come to hopeful and realistic terms with their lives here on earth by clarifying in concrete terms the nature of the kingdom into which they are now

³⁰ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), "A Rule of Life" (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 11.

³¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 187.

³² *Ibid.*, 183.

invited by Jesus' call: "Repent, for the life in the kingdom of the heavens is now one of your options."³³

Willard adds his definition of a disciple, stating that the follower of Jesus "lives in the kingdom of God, and he applies that kingdom for the good of others and even makes it possible for them to enter it for themselves."³⁴ Discipleship is not a class or a process, but rather, the whole of life. "I am learning from Jesus," writes Willard, "how to lead my life, my whole life, my real life."³⁵

What is most helpful for spiritual formation appears in Chapter 9. Willard is not interested in behavior modification. Instead, he proposes a "curriculum for Christ likeness: A Course of Study and Practice for Apprentices to Jesus in the Kingdom Among Us."³⁶ He desires for Jesus followers to be brought to love and delight in the Father continually and to also remove ingrained responses that reject God's kingdom. Willard then offers specific, spiritual disciplines for transformation. Solitude and silence are two spiritual exercises he explores. Both of these are disciplines of abstinence, helping people escape the normal patterns of human responses and replace them with "different immediate responses that are suitable to the kingdom environment."³⁷ Study and worship are two disciplines of engagement. Study "place(s) our minds fully upon

³³ Ibid., 133.

³⁴ Ibid., 282-3.

³⁵ Ibid., 283.

³⁶ Ibid., 316.

³⁷ Ibid., 358.

God and his kingdom.”³⁸ Worship then is the avenue through which to express reverence and awe for God. “In worship,” writes Willard, “we strive for adequate expression of God's greatness [Worship] imprints on our whole being the reality that we study.”³⁹

It will be these spiritual disciplines of abstinence and of engagement that will be considered later under theological reflection. Like Smith, Willard's proposal for a curriculum for becoming formed into the likeness of Christ carries information to know and exercises to do. This coupling of mind and heart, of thought and practice, will be needed to transform a life of busyness so prevalent in GrX and in the Silicon Valley.

The Practice of the Presence of God
by Brother Lawrence

The Practice of the Presence of God was written by Brother Lawrence over 300 years ago. It is divided into four parts: conversations, letters, spiritual maxims and the life of Brother Lawrence. Originally named Nicholas Herman, Brother Lawrence lived “in continuous practice of the presence of God, which he described as a quiet, familiar conversation with him.”⁴⁰ He insisted that “to be constantly aware of God's presence, it is necessary to form the habit of continually talking with Him throughout each day.”⁴¹

Similar to Thomas À Kempis, Brother Lawrence says that to commune with God,

³⁸ Ibid., 361.

³⁹ Ibid., 363.

⁴⁰ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 80.

⁴¹ Ibid., 12.

it is more a matter of the heart than of the mind.⁴² “Neither skill nor knowledge is needed to go to God,” writes Brother Lawrence. “All that is necessary is a heart dedicated entirely and solely to Him out of love for Him above all others.”⁴³

Rather than engage in any special form of retreat or spiritual rules, the “most effective way Brother Lawrence had for communicating with God was to simply do his ordinary work.”⁴⁴ It was not so important to change activities as much as it was important to do them for God rather than for oneself.⁴⁵ He shares, “I haven't followed any particular steps in my own spiritual growth. On the contrary, I found methods to be discouraging.”⁴⁶ Encouragingly, Brother Lawrence teaches,

The most holy and necessary practice in our spiritual life is the presence of God. That means finding constant pleasure in His divine company, speaking humbly and loving him in all seasons, at every moment, without limiting the conversation in anyway. This is especially important in times of temptation, sorrow, separation from God, and even in times of unfaithfulness and sin.⁴⁷

This approach to the spiritual life is similar to something we have discussed in our church community called everyday faith. There is a mental block that some have when talking about spiritual disciplines or spiritual exercises. There seems to be an automatic rejection of disciplines or exercises because of a militant church experience in the past.

⁴² This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 20.

⁴³ Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁵ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 20.

⁴⁶ Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 39.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

Brother Lawrence offers a simple approach to everyday faith that does not call for a change in routine, but rather, a change in how our daily routines are done, and for whom they are done. Practicing the presence of God will increase our mindfulness of God.⁴⁸

I hope that as our church Leadership Team grows in mindfulness of God, the blessings that Brother Lawrence writes about will become true for each person.⁴⁹ Brother Lawrence notes, “The first blessing that the soul receives from the practice of the presence of God is that its Faith is livelier and more active everywhere in our lives.... Second, the practice of the presence of God strengthens us in hope.”⁵⁰ For the body in GrX who is charged with the spiritual oversight of the community, to live with stronger hope and a more lively faith by abiding in God would be a powerful transformation in the Leadership Team.

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly
by Marva Dawn

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly by Marva Dawn outlines both the need and the process for worshipping God through observing the Sabbath. Beyond an understanding of Sabbath as ceasing from work, Dawn explains that Sabbath keeping allows one to cease “from the need to accomplish and be productive, from the worry and tension that accompany our modern criterion of efficiency, from our efforts to be in control of our lives as if we were God, from our possessiveness and our enculturation and, finally, from

⁴⁸ This section adapts material from my final paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “A Rule of Life” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 21.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 71.

the humdrum and meaninglessness that results when life is pursued without the Lord at the center of it all.”⁵¹ The structure of the book is divided into four main sections: ceasing, resting, embracing and feasting.

Ceasing is the starting point for Sabbath rest, but is often the most difficult to do. Dawn insightfully notes, “One of the ugliest things about our culture is that we usually assess a person’s worth on the basis of his or her productivity and accomplishments.... The need to accomplish... leads to a terrible frenzy....The criterion for everything in our society has become efficiency. We seek power in order to climb the corporate ladder.... The root of all of these yearnings to produces is the struggle for security.”⁵² Sabbath ceasing offers a solution to this dilemma. When working ceases, Dawn explains, “We dispense with the need to create our own future.... In our twentieth-century spirituality we easily lose the notion of God’s provision for us because of our advanced civilization and its distance from the actual processes that provide material goods. A major blessing of Sabbath keeping is that it forces us to rely on God for our future.”⁵³

Resting is then possible after ceasing. Resting includes not only physical rest, but also spiritual rest, emotional rest, intellectual rest and social rest. In rest, Dawn writes, “we allow ourselves to *be* rather than forcing ourselves to *do*.”⁵⁴ Emotional and

⁵¹ Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

intellectual rest opens up our hearts and minds to be transformed by God's Holy Spirit.

"Resting provides the necessary time for the Spirit's molding of our characters."⁵⁵

Embracing is the third part of *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*. Dawn encourages movement into an increasingly positive engagement with the Christian life. Embracing requires intentionality, being with God and others in community, and ultimately knowing the *shalom* and wholeness found in God. Dawn explains, the "ordering of the rest of life, when God is at the center gives us the ability to weave together all the bits and pieces of our lives, which often become severely fragmented because of the strains of our surrounding culture."⁵⁶ Intimacy with God gives form, purpose and direction to a life that has become dissipated and disoriented by busyness. It is natural for celebration to follow.

Feasting is the concluding section of Dawn's study on Sabbath keeping. She writes,

Observing the Sabbath includes not only the freedom from, and repentance for work and worry (ceasing), the renewing of our whole being to grace-based faith (resting), and the intentionality of our choosing and valuing (embracing), but also the fun and festivity of a weekly eschatological party.... Sabbath celebration is especially needed in our technological society.... [F]easting is a right-brained activity that gives us better balance—since most of us spend our workdays engaged primarily in left-brained activities. Our Sabbath activities make more use of our senses, our emotions, our creativity, our intuitions.⁵⁷

Far from understanding Sabbath as drudgery, Dawn explores how beauty, music and food can be incorporated into Sabbath keeping. There is the recognition that we can

⁵⁵ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 151.

both participate in a present, joyful celebration of life in God now and anticipate a future, joyful celebration with God in heaven.

Wooden on Leadership
by John Wooden

John Wooden's book, *Wooden on Leadership*, emphasizes the importance of intentionality and planning in order to achieve success. John Wooden was not a theologian, scholar or pastor. Wooden was a basketball coach. Within the sports world, Wooden had unparalleled success. As Head Coach of the UCLA Bruins Men's Basketball Team, Wooden won ten NCAA national championships and led UCLA to eighty-eight straight victories.⁵⁸

In sports, winning is often the highest measure of success. For Wooden, however, he defined success differently. "Success," writes Wooden, "is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable."⁵⁹ In order to achieve this, Wooden took a specific approach to how he worked with his players. He began with a goal in mind, then worked backwards, teaching his basketball players how to succeed to the best of their capabilities.

Wooden developed the "pyramid of success."⁶⁰ There are fifteen specific building blocks which lead to success. The final block is "competitive greatness" which Wooden

⁵⁸ John Wooden, *Wooden On Leadership* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 218.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 16.

explains is possible for each member, because “personal greatness is measured against one’s own potential, not against that of someone else on the team or elsewhere.”⁶¹

For a person to be great on a team, the onus lands with the leader. Whether the goal is athletic or spiritual in nature, Wooden rightly notes, a “good leader determines what occupies the team’s attention, what they work on and worry about. This process begins with what you, the leader, are preoccupied with.... The scoreboard? Championships? A sales quota?”⁶² In the case of GrX and the Leadership Team, the most important thing we can be preoccupied with is our relationship with God.

What is striking is that while Wooden was in the role of a coach, he always saw himself as a “teacher.”⁶³ He believed that basketball was a series of habits that could be taught. As a teacher, Wooden noted that “before telling someone *what* to do, you must teach them *how* to do it.”⁶⁴ The intentionality, purposefulness and teaching of Wooden has direct application to Christian discipleship. Just as basketball is a series of habits, so too are spiritual exercises. In faith, it is not enough to tell someone to have a relationship with God. People must be taught how to do it, hence the need for spiritual practice.

Just as Wooden defines success for his basketball players as making your best effort, I am defining success for our adult leaders as deepening your relationship with God. Wooden and I are both teachers at heart. Success in basketball is often measured by

⁶¹ Ibid., 178.

⁶² Ibid., 211.

⁶³ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 95.

how many points a team can put up on the score board. For Wooden, however, true success was about each person having the peace of mind that they played basketball to the best of their ability. He believed the score would take care of itself. Similarly in a church, it may be tempting to measure success by how many people can fill up the seats on a Sunday. However, true success is about each person abiding in the love of Jesus, knowing God and following the Spirit to the best of their ability. Sunday attendance will take care of itself.

While the spiritual exercises of silence, solitude, prayer, study and rest are quite different than the athletic exercises of free throw shooting or rebounding, they share the similar trait of things that can be practiced. As exercises are practiced with intentionality and purpose, they become habits. The exercises and practices, while seemingly small, actually build habits which contribute toward a much larger goal. For John Wooden's athletes, the larger goals were to be successful and play at one's highest potential. For the GrX Leadership Team, the larger goals are to deepen relationships with the living God, others and ourselves.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Spiritual practices are a gift. They are exercises intended to strengthen one's spiritual well-being. The desired outcomes of the practices are to connect more intentionally with God, with others and even with ourselves. Spiritual exercises are a way to create a posture of humility and openness to be transformed by God. In this way, they are a means of creating greater spiritual and relational maturity, transforming the disciple into ever increasing Christlikeness.

Richard Foster, in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, refers to spiritual practices as “disciplines.” He writes,

The Disciplines... put us where [God] can work within us and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God's means of grace....God has ordained the Disciplines of the spiritual life as the means by which we place ourselves where he can bless us.¹

Foster rightly places the agency of transformation with God and the locus of transformation in people. The practice of spiritual exercises is an avenue by which God can cause growth and change.

¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 7.

Spiritual practices also create greater freedom. Initially, it may seem contradictory for practices to create freedom. However, musicians are well-experienced in this arena. For musicians, the musical exercises of scales and arpeggios are commonplace. The disciplined practice of scales and arpeggios create greater skill in the musician. The musician who has practiced long hours then has the freedom to read and perform complicated music with ease. In the same way, those practiced in spiritual exercises will experience greater freedom and ease in coming to God both in the daily, ordinary activity of life and when navigating a complicated situation or season.

There are several dangers to avoid and obstacles to overcome when undertaking spiritual practices. These dangers and obstacles will be different for each person due to personality, past experience and belief system. It is instructive to recognize these at the outset and be mindful of them during the course of practice, so as not to be hindered or discouraged.

One pitfall is to focus on the behavioral aspect of spiritual practice. The danger is to lose sight of the larger goal. Spiritual exercises are not to be practiced for their own sake. They are to be practiced for the sake of being transformed by God and deepening relationship with God. If the vision fueling spiritual practice becomes clouded, the exercises will become drudgery. One may take them up out of obligation, a sense of guilt or a desire to become righteous by one's work; however, this quickly will result in resentment and an abandonment of the exercises all together. Like the musician who practices scales and arpeggios, the end goal is not mastery of the scales and arpeggios. The end goal is to create music.

Two particular obstacles in the context of Silicon Valley are the elevation of the material and the financial aspects of life over and above the spiritual life. A third obstacle is our propensity to be in control. A fourth obstacle is consumer Christianity. A final hindrance is one of appearance.

The elevation of the material aspects of life over the spiritual aspects of life is understandable. We have an embodied existence, surrounded by things we can see, taste, touch and hear. The physical world reaffirms to us constantly what is real. The spiritual only rarely seems to be something we feel, and far less often, if ever, do we actually see anything spiritual.

Furthermore, higher education in engineering and science, especially prevalent in the backgrounds of the computer oriented population in Silicon Valley, trains us in the empirical. Those things that can be weighed, measured and experimented upon with repeatable results fall into the category of the material. To shift from focusing on the material to focusing on the spiritual can be difficult simply because we lack the exposure, experience and education pertaining to the spiritual.

In a similar manner, emphasis on the financial aspects of life over the spiritual aspects of life is also common in our context. Stress around money or employment is linked to a sense of safety and security in Silicon Valley. More attention is paid to a company's stock value than to its good for society. Money is easier to measure than the spirit. We cannot quantify a person's spirit to see growth as easily as looking at a brokerage account and seeing financial gain.

The desire to be in control is a common struggle in being a follower of Jesus Christ. Christ acknowledges this struggle when he teaches, "If anyone would come after

me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25). In the context of Silicon Valley, workers are intelligent and hard working. They are high achievers and strategic planners. They are well-practiced in getting things done. They are saving for their retirement and maintaining college savings accounts for their children. Being in control has contributed greatly to being a success.

Spiritual exercises call for directed activity, yet also call for a willingness to release control. For people adept at being in control, releasing control will not come without a battle. Thomas Keating rightly observes, “God’s presence is available at every moment, but we have a giant obstacle in ourselves—our world view. It needs to be exchanged for the mind of Christ, for His world view.... [In] prayer the spirit places us in a position where we are at rest and disinclined to fight.”² There is a humility that is required when subjecting oneself to a course of discipline. As Keating goes on to note, “The chief act of the will is not effort but consent.”³ This is not only consent to participate in the spiritual practices, but also consent for God to do the transforming work for us to connect more deeply with God, others and ourselves.

Consumer Christianity is a key obstacle and is prevalent in our American society because we are a consumer culture. In Silicon Valley, there is no shortage of entertainment, food and technology to consume. The average life span of a mobile phone

² Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart, 20th Anniversary Edition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 34.

³ Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 65.

is only twenty-one months.⁴ A consumer Christians may come to our church, GrX, in the same posture as if coming into a restaurant. They would sample and critique elements of our church as if ordering from a menu, enjoying the children's program and message, but perhaps choosing to pass on joining a life group. They would have difficulty participating in and giving themselves over to the practice of spiritual exercises because their posture would be one of consumption rather than participation. The attitude of humble submission to spiritual discipline is foreign to the consumer world view. Willard writes, "The consumer Christian is one who utilizes the grace of God or forgiveness and the services of the church for special occasions, but does not give his or her life and innermost thoughts, feelings, and intentions over to the kingdom of the heavens. Such Christians are not inwardly transformed and not committed to it."⁵

Overcoming the obstacle of consumer Christianity requires a shift in understanding and perspective. The shift in understanding is to move away from considering the church as a restaurant and experience it more as a gym. The people in the church are not divided into waiters and diners, but rather, everyone is an athlete in training. The shift in perspective is to move away from being a consumer to being a fellow participant, athlete and trainee. If the shift in understanding and perspective takes place, then the idea of undertaking spiritual exercises makes sense. If this shift does not take place, the result will be discordant for the participants. In a similar way, diners in a restaurant would be confused as to why they would be encouraged to lift weights.

⁴ Andy Walton, "Life Expectancy of a Smartphone," Chron under "Small Business," <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/life-expectancy-smartphone-62979.html> (accessed March 16, 2018).

⁵ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 342.

A final obstacle in undertaking spiritual exercises is the challenge of appearance. In school, an intelligent student may underperform so as not to deviate from the mean and risk being ostracized for appearing too smart. In a church community, someone with the desire to grow closer to God may be hesitant to practice spiritual exercises for fear of appearing overly spiritual. In the predominantly Asian context of GrX, the desire to not deviate from the mean is strong.

Recognizing obstacles alleviates fear and hesitation around the practice of spiritual exercises. A further encouragement is the knowledge that these exercises are not new, but have been a formative part of the church for centuries. Two authors from the past provide historical grounding and further insight.

Historical Examples from the Church

While spiritual exercises will be a new experience for the majority of people in our GrX church community, spiritual exercises have been used historically by many followers of Jesus to deepen their discipleship. The neglect of spiritual practice is not due to their ineffectiveness as much as to the simple truth that they are very old and have been largely forgotten. Two teachers and practitioners of spiritual exercises are Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Benedict.

Ignatius was born at the family castle of Loyola in the Basque Country of northern Spain in 1491.⁶ As a young man, Ignatius served in the military and was wounded in 1521. In the midst of his recuperation, his conversion of faith began to take

⁶ Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (New York: Image Book, Doubleday, 1989), 11.

root. Influenced by Ludolph of Saxony's *Life of Christ* and Thomas À Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, Ignatius began to create his own set of spiritual exercises.⁷ In 1535, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* was completed, instructing people to engage in a specific form of prayer and examination across four weeks. St. Ignatius offers guidance in contemplation as well as passages from Scripture in order to focus our hearts and minds on God, others and ourselves.⁸

Although the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius contain a high level of detail, he is mindful that the higher purpose of the exercises is to bring one into communion with God. In considering the variety of activities to undertake in life, St. Ignatius comments, "I must look only to the end for which I am created, that is, for the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of my soul. Therefore, whatever I choose must have as its purpose to help me to this end."⁹ Beyond using the exercises as a means of discerning God's will, they are intended to help us imitate Christ and "grow in that most necessary of virtues, love of God and our fellow men, in a word, we will grow in sanctity."¹⁰

Written by Benedict of Nursia (480–547), *The Rule of St. Benedict* is considered by some to be "the most effective synthesis of eastern and western asceticism."¹¹ The

⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸ This section adapts material from my paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), "Reading Reflections" (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 25.

⁹ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, 82-3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ Anthony C. Meisel and M.L. del Mastro, *The Rule of St. Benedict* (New York: Image Double Day, 1975), 25.

Rule was written for the purpose of living the monastic life. However, it contains spiritual exercises that will find resonance with people beyond the monastery.¹² Saint Benedict recognizes that the spiritual exercises and even the larger life commitment to monasticism is not an end in itself. The end goal is to deepen connection and relationship with God. Saint Benedict reminds his readers, “Monasticism is the quest for union with God through prayer, penance and separation from the world, pursued by men sharing a communal life.”¹³

Benedict offers a range of spiritual instruction, often in conjunction with specific exercises. His teaching on humility is tied to practice. “The first degree of humility,” Benedict notes, “is prompt obedience. This is necessary for all who think of Christ above all else.”¹⁴ Humility is expressed in ordinary activity. Benedict points this out in regards to kitchen chores. In a chapter entitled, “Weekly Kitchen Service,” Benedict explains, “The brothers should wait on one another. No one is to be excused from kitchen duty, unless he is ill or he is engaged in a task of greater import, for he can thus obtain greater charity and commendation.”¹⁵ Benedict also offers instruction on the spiritual practices of silence, prayer and the reading of Scripture.

¹² This section adapts material from my paper for Spirituality and Ministry (GM720), “Reading Reflections” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016) 21.

¹³ Meisel, *St. Benedict*, 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

Our Human Need for Spiritual Practice

Our human need for spiritual practice is similar to our human need for learning and repetition in any area of development. Consider learning a foreign language, learning to play tennis or developing the skills of public speaking. While these are varied activities, all of these skills are developed to greater fluency and proficiency through practice. Basketball coaching legend, John Wooden, understood the importance of practice as critical to success. Wooden methodically prepared for his daily basketball team practice by organizing the 120 minutes of coaching time into five, ten and fifteen minute segments, each segment designed for his players to practice different skills.¹⁶

The encouragement is that it is possible to develop spiritually through practice, just as it is possible to develop athletically or linguistically. Skill, fluency and proficiency grow through practice. The key is to focus on the pertinent activities, exercises and practices that will create growth.

“An effective leader,” writes Wooden, “develops the ability to correctly identify the *pertinent* detail or details—incidentals in a market, industry, or sport, for example, that might create an incremental advantage. While the specifics may be small, it is no small task. Success, not the devil, is in the details.”¹⁷ As the Lead Pastor of our church in Silicon Valley, I believe the most vital work we can be doing is to help people connect deeply, personally and authentically with God, others and themselves. The vehicle that can bring us to this destination is the radical, counter-cultural practice of spiritual

¹⁶ Wooden, *Leadership*, 161.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

disciplines. Through the practices of silence, solitude, prayer, study and rest, I believe the people in our church community will discover profound new connection with and understanding of God, others and themselves. As author Jerry Bridges notes,

It is practice that puts feet to the commitment and applies the teaching of the coach. It is practice, where the skill is developed, that makes the athlete competitive in his sport. And it is the practice of godliness that enables us to become godly Christians. There is no shortcut to Olympic-level skill; there is no shortcut to godliness..... We must *practice* godliness, just as the athlete practices his particular sport.¹⁸

Spiritual Practices in Scripture

Scripture contains the stories of people in relationship with God. The spiritual practices and experiences of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest can be found in the narrative of the Old Testament and the New Testament. While Scripture may only occasionally provide instruction on these spiritual practices, the Bible does illustrate men and women in communion with God through them. Our consideration of spiritual experiences and exercises will begin in the Old Testament and move into the New Testament.

In times of solitude, people are drawn into a greater experience of God in the Old Testament. While fleeing from Jezebel, Elijah seeks shelter at Horeb, the mount of God, believing he is the only prophet left alive. While Elijah is alone in a cave, he hears “the sound of a low whisper” (1 Kgs 19:12). As Elijah moves to the entrance of the cave, God speaks to him, giving him words of encouragement. Elijah discovers he is not alone, but

¹⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008), 37.

that God has a plan, and that there will be “seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kgs 19:18).

When Jacob wrestled with God, he was alone. In the struggle, Jacob is given a new name. He is told, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Gn 32:27). Jacob receives a blessing, then named that location “Peniel, saying ‘For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered’” (Gn 32:30).

In the book of Psalms, we see an invitation to solitude and silence. Psalm 46:10 instructs, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 62:1 reads, “For God alone my soul waits in silence, from him comes my salvation.” This is repeated again in Psalm 62:5, “For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.” Psalm 131:1-3 says, “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.” Lamentations 3:25-26 also teaches, “The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

The spiritual practice of prayer is prevalent in the Old Testament. When Nehemiah hears of the destruction of Jerusalem, he “set down and wept and mourned for days... [He] continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (Neh 1:4). Daniel prays when he knew there was an injunction against praying to anyone but King Darius (Dn 6:10). Jonah prays from the belly of the fish (Jon 2:1-9). Moses prays as he contends

with Pharaoh for the freedom of the Hebrew people (Ex 8:30). The book of Psalms is the prayer book of the Bible, filled with prayers of adoration, intercession, hope and lament.

The importance of study can be seen in the Shema, the key mandate of God for God's people which reads,

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise (Dt 6:4-7).

The command for the adults to teach brings in its wake the expectation for the children to study. The tradition to study and to know the Torah continues today as is seen in the Jewish celebration of Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah.

Study of God's Word is also affirmed as a way for living in faithfulness and purity. The Psalmist asks, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:9-11). In this way, attentiveness to Scripture and knowing God's word serve as an anchor, preventing one from becoming disoriented and lost in the world.

The practice of rest is first modeled in the story of creation. God finished the heavens and the earth. The work of creating all creatures and humankind was completed. Genesis explains, "And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation" (Gn 2:2-3).

For God's people, rest becomes codified in the Ten Commandments. Following the model of God in creation, the practice of rest is to become a regular part of the rhythm of life. God commands,

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Ex 20:8-11).

While God calls humankind to rest, God further instructs Moses that even the land shall experience rest. In Leviticus, the Lord speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, when you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard" (Lv 25:1-4).

The practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest are not only present in the Old Testament. These spiritual practices and disciplines are also present in the New Testament. The teaching and modeling found in the New Testament offers further insight and instruction.

The New Testament gives explicit encouragement for spiritual training. Underscoring the value for training, Paul instructs Timothy, "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and

also for the life to come” (1 Tm 4:7-8). Paul also highlights the pursuit of discipline for spiritual benefit in his writings to the church in Corinth. He explains,

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1 Cor 9:24-27).

In addition to these general instructions from Paul, specific spiritual practices are expressed in the life of Jesus and the teachings of the New Testament authors.

Jesus teaches on solitude and prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, saying, “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:6). Solitude and isolation from others for the sake of prayer moves one away from the distraction and adulation of the crowds to more fully focus on communion with the Father. The connection between solitude and prayer is not only taught, but also is modeled by Jesus. As he prepares to choose his first disciples, Jesus withdraws into solitude in order to engage in prayer. The Gospel of Luke explains, Jesus “went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles” (Lk 6:12-13).

While the popularity of Jesus grows and the demands on him became heightened, he seeks solitude and prayer. The Gospel of Mark tells of Jesus in Capernaum, stepping away from the crowds after a full day of healing ministry. Mark writes, “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mk 1:35). The Gospel of Luke also notes this practice. “But now

even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities,” writes Luke, “But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (Lk 5:15-16).

The practice of silence is seen in Jesus as he experiences abuse and stands before Caiaphas the High Priest, the elders and later before Pilate. As Jesus is brought before Pilate, Matthew’s Gospel reads,

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. (Mt 27:11-14).

Wrongfully accused, Jesus remains silent. In practicing silence, Jesus foregoes defensiveness. The silence of Jesus is highlighted in the Book of Acts, when Philip comes upon the Ethiopian eunuch who is confused by a reading from Isaiah 53, “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth” (Acts 8:32). Through this passage, Philip tells the eunuch about the good news of Jesus Christ.

The book of James offers insight for the practice of silence through the warnings around the power of the tongue. James writes,

Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. (Jas 3:4-8a)

James offers the instruction, “let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (Jas 1:19). The taming of the tongue and the capacity of being slow to speak are enhanced by the practice of silence. One who is practiced in silence can readily remain silent and be quicker to hear than to speak.

The experience of study in the New Testament may be found in the relationship of the disciples to Jesus. For three years, the disciples experienced an extended study internship, following Jesus, listening to his teachings and learning from his manner of life. Jesus is their rabbi. The disciples, by the very definition of their relationship to Christ, seek to learn from Jesus, study his life and conform their lives to his (Jn 9:2, Mk 11:21).

In the New Testament, the letters of the Apostle Paul invite careful study. Paul gives practical teaching and theological interpretation to the early churches as well as individuals. His writings to the churches in Rome, Philippi, Galatia, Thessalonica, Corinth, Colossae and Ephesus are for communal engagement. Individually, Paul writes to Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Paul encourages Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tm 2:15). Paul further writes, “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tm 3:14-15). For Timothy to rightly handle Scripture, study and learning are essential.

The practice of rest is found in both the teaching and practice of Jesus. In the midst of full and demanding ministry activities, Jesus encourages his disciples to rest.

Mark's Gospel says, "And he [Jesus] said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves" (Mk 6:31-32). Jesus' teaching on rest calls his followers to find rest in him. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden," says Jesus, "and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11:28-30). The invitation is to not labor ceaselessly, but rather to discover rest for our souls in Christ.

Jesus not only teaches rest, but models rest. He is asleep in the stern of the boat while a storm rages around him and his disciples (Mk 4:35-41). The disciples, fearing for their lives, awaken Jesus, who then calms the storm. Jesus queries the disciples, asking, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mk 4:40). Through this episode, a connection between rest and faith can be drawn. In order to rest, there must be faith that God will provide and take care of the storms we perceive. In order to find rest for our souls, there must be faith that the words of Jesus are trustworthy, that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Mt 11:30).

Scripture instructs, encourages and narrates spiritual practice. The spiritual exercises of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest will each now be considered. Each practice offers unique challenges. Each practice also creates unique pathways to deepen our connection with God, others and ourselves.

Solitude

Solitude is to be alone with God. Because of God's presence, solitude is being apart from others without being lonely. In the practice of solitude we intentionally draw

away from the presence of others in order to draw closer to the God who is present.

Richard Foster explains,

Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment. Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times.... [For] if we possess inward solitude we do not fear being alone, for we know that we are not alone.¹⁹

As external solitude is practiced, an internal solitude begins to develop. Sometimes this is thought of as grounding, maturity, confidence or contentedness. The practice of solitude cultivates an inner confidence in the perpetual presence of God. As we are continually aware of God, we live in the joyful discovery that we are never truly alone.

The practice of solitude is a practice to seek God with intention. As God is sought, we come into a posture of openness and expectation to encounter God. Solitude directs our attention toward what God may want to reveal or transform. The spiritual practice of solitude contains anticipation for what God will do. James Bryan Smith explains,

Solitude is spending time apart from other people. Usually we experience solitude when no one happens to be around. But that's not the kind of solitude I'm describing. Effective solitude is intentional time alone with ourselves and with God. Then God can do something powerful within us in the area of identity.... When we step away from people for a period of time, there is no one to impress, no one's opinions of us, no image to live up to or down to...Because there was no one around, I could be myself. There was no need to be clever or funny or smart. And after I came face to face with myself, I encountered God. And God—not the world, not my friends or family members—began to shape my identity.”²⁰

The goodness of solitude is found in God's presence as we come away by ourselves. Encountering our brokenness would lead to despair, were we truly isolated

¹⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 97.

²⁰ Smith, *Good and Beautiful God*, 166-167.

from everything and everyone. The beautiful goodness of solitude is that while we are apart from others, we are not isolated from God. It is in solitude that God reminds us of unconditional love, unmerited favor, forgiveness, acceptance and eternal community.

To face oneself in solitude is to encounter both the light and the darkness in one's personality, both the strengths and the gaps in character, both the successes and failures of the past. Foster refers to the solitude of the heart as "inward attentiveness."²¹ Solitude in God's presence uncovers both our giftedness and our brokenness. For those feeling broken and worthless, our giftedness affirms God's good work in our lives and reminds us of our worth as children of God. For those tempted toward success-based pride, our brokenness is a humble reminder that all are ultimately under the grace and judgment of God. By encountering our own giftedness and brokenness, we begin to see other people in this same way and discover empathy. Everyone is a blend of light and darkness, and God's grace covers all. In this way, the practice of solitude can draw us into deeper connection with others, a deeper self-awareness and a deeper experience of God's love.

The profound gift of solitude is found in the intentionality of practicing something counter to one's natural inclinations. Humans, made in the image of God, are created for community (Gn 1:26-27). However, it is through the practice of solitude that one comes to a greater appreciation for others. Just as a greater appreciation for food and God's provision emerge after a season of fasting, so too does a greater appreciation for human relationships and God's provision of community emerge after a season of solitude.

²¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 97.

Silence

The practice of silence is actually the practice of learning to listen. Deepening connection with God, others and ourselves requires the ability to listen well and pay attention. However, the external noise surrounding us and the internal noise of our worries and fears create distractions and make listening difficult.

The spiritual practice of silence is aided by the practice of solitude. As we practice solitude and draw away from others, we remove the voices of others for a season. Solitude also removes us from the noise of culture, advertisement, traffic and urgent requests. With the external noise diminished, there are two other sources of noise which must be addressed. The first is our personal, external noise of speaking. The second is the personal, internal noise of the mind.

The practice of silence is an invitation to refrain from talking. It is a fast not from food, but from words. With this comes the ceasing of behaviors and power associated with words. The practice of silence is to cease from defensiveness and self-justification. The practice of silence is to cease from exercising power over others to command, teach, manager or lead. The practice of silence is to cease from asking and requesting from others to meet our needs. To cease from speaking quiets the person externally. Once quieted externally with our voice, we are prepared to practice silence internally and bring quiet to the internal noise of the mind.

The internal practice of silence in the mind is often more difficult than the external physical practice. Once the external noise of culture is reduced and the external personal noise of the voice is silent, the noise in the mind comes roaring to the fore. The noise of the mind can take the form of fears, worries, anxiety, self-condemnation, regret,

unfinished chores, broken relationships, unanswered work emails or any of a myriad of other distractions which call for attention.

The spiritual practice of silence calls for a gentle, laying aside of these internal voices. This simple act of laying aside may take several hours before coming to a place of internal, silence. When the external and the internal are practicing silence together, the way of listening to God is open. In this place of inner silence, a deep connection with God can be found. Keating observes,

“The experience of interior silence or “resting in God” is beyond thinking, images, and emotions. This awareness tells you that the core of your being is eternal and indestructible and that you as a person are loved by God and share the divine life.”²²

Prayer

Prayer is so common in the Christian faith, it would be easy to overlook the need to consider it. The practice of praying before meals or praying during a Sunday worship service are two examples of regular prayer, but these prayer forms can give us a limited understanding. The exercise of prayer can suffer from being reduced to a list of things to tell to God or to request from God. While telling things to God is one aspect of prayer, prayer is much more dynamic. The following will begin with a basic understanding of prayer then briefly consider the efficacy of prayer and the actual practice of prayer.

To understand prayer is to recognize that prayer is not so much about the words as it is an experience of communion with God. Prayer is conversation with God, with elements of both speaking and listening. In prayer there is space both for expression and

²² Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 127.

reception and an expectation that a dialogue or exchange will take place. Prayer is also more comprehensive than merely the use of words. Prayer is a matter of heart, soul, mind and body. The exercise of prayer calls us into greater attentiveness toward God and into a greater awareness of ourselves. Thomas Merton shares,

Prayer is ... not just a formula of words, or a series of desires springing up in the heart—it is the orientation of our whole body, mind and spirit to God in silence, attention, and adoration. All good meditative prayer is a conversation of our entire self to God. One cannot enter into meditation, in this sense, without a kind of inner upheaval. By upheaval I do not mean a disturbance, but a breaking out of routine, a liberation of the heart from the cares and preoccupations of one's daily business.²³

When prayer is considered as a reorientation of our whole selves, prayer as an exercise becomes liberated from the confines of time and space. Prayer becomes integrated with all of the other activities of life rather than one of a myriad of scheduled activities. Writing on the spiritual practice of prayer, Daniel Wolpert notes, “Our whole existence is transformed as we begin to seek God in all that we do and in all that we are. Our lives are no longer compartmentalized into times for prayer and times for other things.”²⁴

In this way, prayer is an exercise that moves us into a profound and holistic space of freedom to encounter the living God in whatever form God may be present to us. This space may create fear or anxiety because the locus of control shifts from ourselves to God. Prayer as telling God a list of requests keeps oneself at the center of control. Prayer as thirty minutes in the morning before starting the work day keeps God

²³ Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958), 48.

²⁴ Daniel Wolpert, *Creating a Life with God* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2003), 149.

compartmentalized. Shifting our understanding to being attentive to God calls us to attend to the way God is moving and speaking at all times. One obstacle, however, to this manner of prayer is the releasing of control.

The efficacy of prayer is intimately tied to the capacity to release control. Prayer as communion with God calls forth a humility to open oneself to anything that God may say. To be in communion with God is to be open to change. Whereas a list of prayer requests may lead to the belief that prayer can change God, prayer as conversation with God leads to the understanding that prayer can change us. Richard Foster explains,

Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father.... Real prayer is life creating and life changing.... To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us.²⁵

The actual activity or practice of prayer is both simple and difficult. It is simple in that one needs merely to be in a posture of attentive receptiveness to God. However, as soon as one attempts to practice prayer, there will be the difficulties of external and internal distractions that will quickly emerge. The practices of solitude and silence can be helpful steps in practicing prayer. In the practice of prayer, finding a place of solitude and silence is modeled by Jesus (Mk 1:35, 14:35). The practice of solitude removes environmental distractions, opening up the possibility for greater attentiveness to God. The practice of silence creates quiet to be able to listen to God's voice.

Author and teacher, Thomas Green gives instruction on how prayer can be practiced. He offers this helpful metaphor, comparing prayer to swimming.

²⁵ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33.

All the great masters of prayer... insist that we should continue meditating as long as we're able; that is, we should continue to be active until the Lord takes over. At the same time, once God takes over, we should not resist—although most of us will fight the process because it's strange to us and we don't know what to do.... You don't jump into the water and just let yourself sink, waiting for God to hold you up. No, as long as it's appropriate, you swim, but when the Lord takes over, when God carries you, then you should stop kicking. It's a question of being willing to labor humbly in the basic ways of prayer as long as the Lord wishes, as well as being willing to let go and let God take over.²⁶

In prayer, Green highlights the need for our activity, but also the need for us to release control. As we pray in this way of attentive, active humility, we watch for God's activity and enter into deeper communion with God.

Study

Study is the practice of honing attention. While study may not readily come to mind as a key spiritual discipline, the capacity to focus one's attention and to be attentive in one's mind is tied to our capacity for prayer and ultimately to being attentive to the Holy Spirit. French writer Simone Weil captures this as she writes, "The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of prayer."²⁷ The simple act of studying any subject matter as an exercise enhances our ability to pay attention, thereby expanding our capacity to pray.

Study as a spiritual discipline finds value in fostering humility. Study draws one into humility before a subject of study. Weil rightfully observes,

²⁶ Thomas Green (SJ), *Experiencing God: The Three Stages of Prayer* (Makati City, Philippines: St. Pauls, 2010), 67.

²⁷ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009), 57.

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached and empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of.... Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.... We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them.²⁸

Study is an exercise that holds value regardless of the subject, because study is an activity that trains the mind to focus in humble, open expectation. This focused attentiveness may then be brought into times of prayer through what is known in education as transference.

Transference is the ability to transfer skills from one arena and use them in another.

Increased capacity to be openly attentive to a literary work or a calculus problem means increased capacity to be openly attentive to God. As Simone Weil notes,

Never in any case whatever is a genuine effort of the attention wasted. It always has its effect on the spiritual plane and in consequence on the lower one of the intelligence, for all spiritual light lightens the mind.... If we concentrate our attention on trying to solve a problem of geometry, and if at the end of an hour we are no nearer to doing so than at the beginning, we have nevertheless been making progress each minute of that hour in another more mysterious dimension. Without our knowing or feeling it, this apparently barren effort has brought more light into the soul. The result will one day be discovered in prayer.²⁹

One obstacle to overcome in considering the spiritual practice of study can be found in one's personal experience of academics. Study is often tied deeply with the stress of examinations, competition and striving for achievement. Study can be connected to performance which can be linked to a sense of self-worth. Reimagining study as a spiritual practice can reclaim this exercise as a vehicle for spiritual maturity rather than as an activity of anxiety. A second obstacle to recognize is the cultural experience of study

²⁸ Ibid., 62.

²⁹ Ibid., 58.

as a largely secular activity. Public or private education contains curriculum focused on mathematics, language arts and science, but often little or no offerings on religion or theology.

To the matter of theology and knowing God, the spiritual practice of study can be beneficial if the pitfalls of achievement and academic performance can be avoided.

Theological study is the act of critical reflection drawing together Scripture, history, culture, experience, philosophy, art and science to seek understanding of God. Pastor and writer A.W. Tozer writes passionately about the study of God saying,

Theology itself is a beautiful thing, beautiful because it is the mind reasoning about God. It is the mind down on its knees in a state of breathless devotion, reasoning about God—or it should be. It is possible for theology to become a very hard and aloof thing, and we can lose God right out of our theology. But the kind of theology I’m talking about, the study of God, is a beautiful thing.³⁰

If and when the study of God becomes a laborious and torturous activity, it would then be appropriate to query if God has been lost and if something else such as achievement or striving has taken the place of prominence in one’s heart and mind.

The joy of learning can be an indicator of the attitude motivating the practice of study, especially as it pertains to theology. Simone Weil writes,

The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running.... It is the part played by joy in our studies that makes of them a preparation for spiritual life, for desire directed toward God is the only power capable of raising the soul. Or rather, it is God alone who comes down and possesses the soul, but desire alone draws God down. He only comes to those who ask him to come; and he cannot refuse to come to those who implore him long, often, and ardently.³¹

³⁰ A. W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God* (Chicago: Wing Spread Publishers, 2003), 188.

³¹ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 61.

The spiritual practice of study is the practice that ardently implores God for illumination. The joyful result will be to draw close to God and for God to draw close to us.

Rest

The practice of rest is taught and modeled by Jesus. The practice of Sabbath rhythm is mandated by Scripture. The need for rest can be easily articulated by any who feel overworked and sleep deprived. And yet, the challenge of actually practicing rest is difficult. One significant challenge is the culture of Silicon Valley, marked by high activity and demanding work schedules. Writing about pace and the human tendency to match those around us, Pastor Kirk Byron Jones notes, “.... if everyone around you is moving fast, rarely resting and never stopping, the likelihood of you doing the same is inevitable unless you intentionally begin to live at a sacred, savoring pace.”³²

Beyond the external challenge of Silicon Valley’s high activity culture, there is the internal challenge rooted in fear: the fear of missing out. Whimsically known as “FOMO” (fear of missing out), the fear of missing something fun or being labelled as anti-social drives the desire to fill the social calendar. The desire for social engagement is to connect with others and to create community. The hope is for authentic, trusted friendships. The irony is that social activity driven by the fear of missing out undermines our capacity for intimacy when we relate to others out of restlessness. In *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Dawn writes to the issues of Silicon Valley and offers the practice of rest as a solution. She explains,

³² Kirk Byron Jones, *Rest in the Storm* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001), 57.

One of the most terrifying aspects of the technological society is its loss of intimacy. Many people in our culture are desperate for affection and most do not know how to give or receive it....Sabbath keeping offers us hope for relationships because of its emphasis on one's relationship with God, its rhythms of community and solitude, its gift of time, and its call to cease striving and productivity and work. Furthermore, the intentionality of the day lends itself to a conscious enjoyment of our relationships with, and delight in, each other as the outgrowth of our delight in Yahweh."³³

Rest creates the space to reflect on one's life, meaning and purpose. Rest allows for gratitude of provision from God and appreciation for others. A restless life rarely takes time to consider God's activity, the sanctity of human relationships or the gift of existence. "Sabbath was... intended to provide people a rhythm by which to reflect on their lives," writes Reggie McNeal. "Putting off Sabbath means putting off life."³⁴

Rest requires assurance that God will provide and that one can be whole without attending every social function. Rest requires the perspective that life is more than work, self-worth is disconnected from achievement and true belonging can never be found in a company that calls for sixty hour work weeks. The practice of rest also requires intentionality, as do all of the spiritual practices. The next chapter will offer the ministry program, intentional ways for adult leaders to grow and the specific practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest.

³³ Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 189.

³⁴ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 143.

PART THREE
MINISTRY PRACTICE

CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY PROGRAM GOALS & PLANS

The overarching ministry goals for this program are for participants to strengthen their relationship with God and deepen their connection with God, others and themselves. The busyness of life in Silicon Valley creates distraction from a life devoted to God. The technology and demands of work create disconnection from others. The pace of life inhibits time for self-reflection and self-awareness. Through the strategic and intentional practice of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest, participants will engage in a ministry plan which endeavors to create reconnection in these vital relationships with God, others and oneself.

The GrX Leadership Team is the starting place and focus group for this ministry initiative. The Leadership Team is the elected board, exercising its power through the oversight of financial matters and the creation of policy to govern the church. Organizationally, the Leadership Team holds authority such that all staff and the Lead

Pastor are accountable to this team. Beyond organizational authority, the Leadership Team is also charged with the spiritual oversight of the church.¹

The Leadership Team meets regularly on the second Tuesday of each month. The agenda for the monthly meetings is a balance of spiritual and logistical items. The regularity of the Leadership Team meetings, along with the emphasis on spiritual oversight for the church, makes these gatherings well suited for the spiritual development of the team members. A danger for a church board is to place too much emphasis on the logistical or organizational matters of a church community. This ministry project is an investment in the spiritual well-being and development of Leadership Team members. In short, this ministry project is discipleship. The Leadership Team meetings will be transformed into a gathering for intentional spiritual growth through the addition of teaching, practice, reflection and accountability around spiritual exercises.

September is the beginning of the GrX ministry year. In September, the newly elected Leadership Team holds its first meeting together. Leadership Team members serve for two years. Members are staggered so that in September, some will be starting their first year while other members will begin the second year of their two year term.

The ministry program for the practice of spiritual exercises will also follow an annual cycle. To begin, there will be a pre-program, self-evaluation for participants. Then the five spiritual practices will be divided into one-month teaching segments. Each

¹ Great Exchange Covenant Church, *Great Exchange Covenant Church Bylaws* Article II: Leadership Team, Section 1: Purpose (Santa Clara: Great Exchange Covenant Church, September 2015).

spiritual practice will be explored for two months total. The year will conclude with a post-program, self-evaluation.

Pre-program Evaluation

The pre-program, self-evaluation will be distributed in August to the incoming Leadership Team members. In August, the GrX church community holds elections for the Leadership Team. Although the Leadership Team will not officially meet until September, the new team is established in August elections at which time, orientation materials are made available. The pre-program evaluation will be distributed to all Leadership Team members and will be due at the time of the first Leadership Team meeting in September. The evaluation will be kept confidential. The pre-program evaluation will consist of quantitative and qualitative questions intended to create a baseline of experience and practice around the spiritual exercises for each person.

The pre-program evaluation will contain three parts. Part One is intended to establish some data points around busyness, stress and connection or disconnection with God, others and oneself. Part One will include the following questions. How busy or stressed do you feel and what are the contributing factors? On a scale from one to ten (with one being disconnected and ten being connected) how disconnected or connected do you feel with God? On a scale from one to ten, how disconnected or connected do you feel with others? On a scale from one to ten, how disconnected or connected do you feel with yourself?

Part Two of the pre-program evaluation will contain qualitative questions aimed at generating narrative, experiential answers. The following questions will be included. What do you do in your life that most helps you connect with God, with others and with

yourself? What has been your experience with spiritual exercises? What spiritual exercises do you presently practice? What is your experience with the practice of solitude? What is your experience with the practice of silence? What is your experience with the practice of prayer? What is your experience with the practice of study? What is your experience with the practice of rest? Of these five spiritual practices (solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest), which one is most familiar to you and which is the least familiar to you? Of these five spiritual practices, which one is the most intriguing to you and why? Which one creates the most concern or worry for you and why? Which one creates the most joy for you and why?

Part Three of the evaluation will ask quantitative questions pertaining to the spiritual practices. The following questions will be included. One a scale of one to ten (with one being little experience and ten being much experience), how much experience have you had with the practice of solitude? How much experience have you had with the practice of silence? How much experience have you had with the practice of prayer? How much experience have you had with the practice of study? How much experience have you had with the practice of rest?

The heart of the ministry program divides the five spiritual practices into monthly lessons. Across the whole ministry year, each spiritual practice will be explored twice. The first month of each practice will consist of an introduction and basic exercises. The second month will have a deeper exploration, reflection and practice. September to February will be the initial exploration of the five spiritual practices. March to July will cover the second engagement of each of the spiritual practices. August will contain the post-program, self-evaluation for each member of the Leadership Team.

Ministry Program

September will mark the beginning of ministry program. An overview of the five spiritual practices (solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest) will be provided. Passages from Scripture will be included in this overview, along with a brief exposure to the books presented in the literature review above. The passages from Scripture and the books will serve as resources for participants throughout the ministry program.

September will also introduce the first spiritual practice: solitude. Participants will be encouraged to practice solitude with the understanding that they will be alone, but alone with God. Solitude is not loneliness, but rather, a place and time where we withdraw from others in order to come more fully into God's presence. As Henri Nouwen, writes, "Solitude is... the place... of the great encounter... where Christ remodels us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world. Solitude is the place of our salvation."² To practice solitude, participants will choose a time and place to practice twenty minutes of solitude each day. Journaling on this experience will be encouraged.

October will be the second Leadership Team meeting of the year and provide the first opportunity for sharing. Participants will briefly share about their experiences with solitude. Particular attention will be paid to encounters with God and personal obstacles. Participants will be encouraged toward continuing to practice, recognizing that any new exercise can be difficult and can take time to develop fluency. Going forward, each

² Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 31-32.

Leadership Team meeting will consist of reflection on the previous month's practice and an introduction of the next practice.

October will introduce the spiritual practice of silence, building from the practice of solitude. As noted by Dallas Willard, "Silence goes beyond solitude.... But silence is frightening because it strips us as nothing else does, throwing us upon the stark realities of our life."³ Participants will be encouraged to practice twenty minutes of silence each day, just as they had practiced solitude. Journaling will again be encouraged, this time with the invitation to answer the question, "What are you hearing from God?"

October will also be the time of the silent retreat. The Jesuit Retreat Center is a beautiful, twenty-two acre, forested, property located in nearby Los Altos. This center regularly holds silent retreats and allows for groups to come and hold their own retreat. GrX church will hold an annual silent retreat in October. The GrX silent retreat will run from Friday dinner through Sunday lunch, allowing for participants to come after the work day. Because many will likely be new to silence and solitude in a retreat format, Friday night will begin with an orientation about the weekend, the practice of silence and possible ways to spend time during the retreat. Retreatants will enter silence together Friday night after the orientation and emerge from silence together through a simple worship service Sunday morning. Worship will lead into a short session for group discussion, sharing and personal reflection. The silent retreat will end with a non-silent lunch together. Joyful reconnection and a deepened experience of community with others is a possible outcome at this retreat-ending meal. Over the course of the weekend retreat,

³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 163.

each participant will have their own room, creating a safe space for solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest.

November will formally open the practice of prayer. Participants will be encouraged to practice different forms of prayer in order to discover different ways to enhance awareness of and strengthen relationship with God. Walking prayer will be encouraged. Many people in our church community work in office buildings. Walking and praying invites participants to be mindful of ones surroundings while also being mindful of God. Walking slowly will also be encouraged in order for participants to practice slowing down from the busyness around them. While walking, participants will be instructed to simply talk with God and listen.

November also marks the time in the church when people make financial pledges and decisions around tithing. Tithing will be incorporated into the November prayer practice. In his book on prayer practices, Daniel Wolpert writes, “Tithing is a prayer practice because it forces us into relationship with God. We must ask God for what we need.”⁴ Participants will be encouraged to pray around their financial stewardship and their sense of God’s leading in their pledge. Tithing brings up many good things in our journey of faith. We come face to face with worry, anxiety, fear, hope and trust. We must grapple with the difference between ownership and stewardship. We confront our own history with money, scarcity and generosity. The amount of money is not important. What is important is that in this practice of prayer, we become more deeply in touch with God and with ourselves.

⁴ Wolpert, *Creating a Life with God*, 154.

December will be a pause in the ministry program, where no new spiritual practices will be introduced. December will be a time to focus on the season of Advent and the celebration of Christmas. With the practices of solitude, silence and prayer having already been introduced, participants may choose to continue to practice any of these during December and journal on their experiences.

January will take up the spiritual practice of study. Program participants will be asked to read the essay by Simone Weil, “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God.”⁵ Participants will also be asked to choose one item to study for the month. Because this will be the first practice of study, creativity will be encouraged. A topic from Scripture or theology such as love or faith may be chosen. Other subjects such as film, fishing, physics, vegetable gardening or bird watching will also be welcomed. The key to this practice is to be specific, then devote oneself to the study of a particular topic so as to focus attention. Through the course of the study, there will grow an appreciation for the topic. There will also be a humility that is practiced, as the subject matter under question will begin to reveal deeper truth. Participants will need to assume the posture of a learner in order to receive greater understanding. Before the February meeting, participants will be asked to submit a one-page paper on what they studied and what they noticed in themselves during the practice of study.

February will introduce the final practice of rest. The introductory teaching will include a brief study of Sabbath rest and the model of Jesus resting. Participants will also be encouraged to consider how much rest they take and to name personal obstacles that

⁵ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 57-65.

prevent them from resting. The practice of rest may take several forms, with each participant free to choose how to exercise this spiritual discipline. Some may choose to go to sleep consistently each evening. Others may choose to take a regular afternoon nap. Still others may participate in aspects of Sabbath such as resting from work or from buying and selling. While there will be freedom to choose, it will be important for each Leadership Team member to be specific in choosing their particular form of practicing rest. Journal writing will be encouraged to enhance learning and self-reflection.

March will be a return to the practice of solitude. Participants will review their initial journal reflections from the month of September, when they first practiced solitude. They will note what was helpful and unhelpful about their previous practice. Participants will then be encouraged to again, practice twenty minutes of solitude each day and to journal about their experience, their learning and their insights. Teaching on the practice of solitude will briefly note challenges and benefits.

The challenges of solitude include the perpetual busyness of life in Silicon Valley and the fear of being alone. The benefits of solitude are many. Solitude creates a space for us to rest mentally, physically and emotionally, to separate from surrounding demands for time and attention and to be alone in God's presence. In separation from others, solitude creates a deeper appreciation for others and for community. Solitude reminds us of people who we are missing and moves us to pray, thanking God who gives the gift of others. Solitude creates freedom, revealing that we can be apart from others, yet still remain whole.

In April, participants will re-engage with the practice of silence. In October, participants were invited to practice silence for twenty minutes each day. In April,

participants will be encouraged to choose one day each week to practice silence. One helpful rhythm is to begin and end the practice of silence in the evening. Beginning the spiritual practice of silence at bed time transforms our understanding of sleep into an act of spiritual growth. Entering into silence and sleep acknowledges God's presence and God's care. Upon waking up, the morning routine is a continuation of the practice of silence. In silence, attention to the details of life such as preparing a cup of coffee is enhanced. Going through a day of work and activity in the practice of silence and without words creates a greater awareness of others. In situations of conflict, frustration or blame, the practice of silence places participants in a posture of humility, where verbal self-justification and defensiveness are sacrificed. In situations where cultural norms require or expect speaking, participants would be encouraged to respond. It is more important to express love than legalism. Participants will be encouraged to journal at the close of each day of silence, noting what they experienced and what they discovered about God, others and themselves.

The practice of silence may also include the reading of Scripture. Theologian and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, sees a vital link between the practice of silence and the study of God's Word. He also offers a caution to the practitioners of this exercise by noting,

Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God.... Silence is nothing else but waiting for God's Word and coming from God's Word with a blessing. But everybody knows that this is something that needs to be practiced and learned, in these days when talkativeness prevails. Real silence, real stillness, really holding one's tongue comes only as the sober consequence of spiritual stillness.... If we have learned to be silent before the Word, we shall also learn to manage our silence and our speech during the day. There is such a thing as forbidden, self-indulgent silence, a proud, offensive silence. And this means that it can never be merely silence as such. The silence of the Christian is listening

silence, humble stillness, that may be interrupted at any time for the sake of humility.⁶

The month of May will be a further exploration of the practice of prayer. Building on the practice of walking prayer, participants will be encouraged to pray continually throughout their day and to incorporate prayer into all of their daily activities. As Dallas Willard writes, "... prayer as a discipline has its greatest force in strengthening the spiritual life only as we learn to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6)."⁷ Throughout the month of May, participants will be encouraged to pray conversationally with God. The goal is for people to deepen their awareness of God. God is present at home, at work and in times of play. Often, we are not mindful and too busy or preoccupied with our own thoughts. As we pray continually, we will become more continually aware that God is with us. Our encounters with others will be opportunities to pray and interceded for them as we talk with them.

Prayer as a spiritual practice need not be long and complicated. Simple, sentence prayers in the midst of daily activities can also be expressions of praying continually. Author Todd Hunter emphasizes the importance of incorporating the practice of prayer into his daily routine and also notes the benefits. He writes,

Over the past seventeen years I have taken seriously, with adaptation appropriate to my needs, the idea of spiritual disciplines.... I took on some very simple disciplines that I could practice within my daily routines. For instance, as I am about to get on a conference call, I pray, "Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight on this call." Later, as I walk down the hallway to a meeting, I pray, "Lord, may your kingdom come and may your will be done in this gathering." ... These practices, and others like

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954), 79-80.

⁷ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 185.

them, have transformed my heart and life. No big deal, no huge effort, but enormous return on investment.⁸

June will again take up the spiritual practice of study. Participants will be invited to return to their original topic of study in order to further deepen their learning and hone their capacity to focus. Particular attention will be paid to the sense of excitement or drudgery related to this practice. Further reflection in the area of study will include the following questions. What truth are you discovering through your study? What are you learning about yourself through the practice of study? Are you discovering anything about God and if so, what? Are you discovering anything about people and if so, what? What has most facilitated your practice of study? What has most hindered your practice? Has your capacity to pay attention grown? Participants will be invited to provide written responses to these questions by the following meeting.

July will be a return to the practice of rest. Participants will be invited to create a day of rest and to practice this day of rest once a week. Like the Sabbath, participants will cease from their regular work, and engage in life-giving, soul affirming activities. The key to this practice of rest is to engage in something while being mindful of God's presence, goodness and love. Ideas include traditional Sabbath practices such as worship, the reading of God's Word and the sharing of a meal with others, however, this day of rest is not limited. Other ideas are cultivating a garden, creating art, playing or immersing oneself in beauty.

⁸ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 90-91.

The summer presents opportunities for vacation, but sometimes, the habit of busyness and over-activity can simply be transferred from a work setting to a holiday setting. The summer is also the time when our GrX church community is engaged in Vacation Bible School, GrX Hoops (summer basketball program), youth camp, children's camp and short-term foreign missions. There is never a shortage of good things to do.

It is striking that in the life of Jesus, Christ encourages rest as he and his disciples are deeply engaged in ministry. "On one occasion," writes Ray Anderson, "he [Jesus] called his disciples away from the ministry of teaching and healing because... 'many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in a boat to a deserted place by themselves' (Mark 6:31-32)."⁹ The words of Jesus were an explicit invitation for his disciples to rest. Jesus said, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while" (Mk 6:31). The practice of rest will be one of coming away to be in the presence of Jesus, giving ourselves to something outside of our regular routine of work.

August will conclude the ministry year and contain the post-program, self-evaluation. August will also mark the end of the GrX ministry year and the end of the term for the present Leadership Team members. At the August meeting, members will have the opportunity to reflect on their practice of rest in July as well as share about their overall experience with the year of practicing spiritual disciplines.

⁹ Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 82.

Post-program Evaluation

The post-program, self-evaluation will be distributed in August to the Leadership Team members and due at the end of the month. Like the pre-program evaluation, the post-program evaluation will also be kept confidential. The post-program evaluation will contain three parts, following the format of the pre-program evaluation. The hope is that through this second evaluation, growth might be seen.

Part One will focus on connection or disconnection with God, others and oneself and include the following questions. What are two or three key learnings for you from this past year? Through the practice of spiritual exercises, have you grown and if so, how? Have the practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest, affected your sense of busyness or stress and if so, how? On a scale from one to ten (with one being disconnected and ten being connected) how disconnected or connected do you feel with God after having practiced these spiritual exercises for a year? On a scale from one to ten, how disconnected or connected do you feel with others after having practiced these spiritual exercises? On a scale from one to ten, how disconnected or connected do you feel with yourself after having practiced these spiritual exercises?

In Part Two of the post-program evaluation the following questions will be included. Which spiritual practices (solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest) most help you connect with God? Which practices most help you connect with others? Which practices most help you connect with yourself? Which spiritual practice is most difficult for you and why? Which spiritual practice is most life giving or joyful for you and why?

Part Three of the post-program evaluation will ask future-oriented questions intended to encourage further spiritual practice. The following questions will be included.

When was an episode this past year where your practice of the spiritual exercises affected your actions and/or attitude? Think about someone who knows you, would they say you have grown over this past year and if so, how? Of the five spiritual practices (solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest), are there any that you plan to continue to intentionally practice? If so, what is your plan? Are there other, additional spiritual practices you know about and are intrigued to practice? If so, what are they? Who are the people in your life who you think would benefit from this ministry program and the practice of spiritual exercises in community with others?

Six months after the post-program, self-evaluation, a shorter, follow-up self-evaluation will be sent to program participants. There is the danger that such an evaluation may create a feeling of guilt or shame in those who had hoped to continue practicing, but who have discontinued. The goal of this follow-up evaluation is not to create shame, but rather to further remind and encourage participants to continue to deepen their relationship with God, others and themselves. The follow-up evaluation will be personalized. Each person will receive their own post-program, self-evaluation. The following instructions and questions will also be included. Please take a moment to read your responses from six months ago. How connected or disconnected do you feel from God, others and yourself today? Given your life situation today, would there be any spiritual practices (solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest) that would create life and joy for you presently?

Having considered the ministry program and the spiritual exercises for individual members of the GrX Leadership Team, a further step is the implementation and assessment of the program in the church community. There will be key principles guiding

the implementation of the program. The program assessment will include the impact on the wider church community.

CHAPTER 5

PROGRAM: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY & ASSESSMENT

There are four key, guiding principles for the implementation strategy of this ministry program. The program shall be focused, invitational, intentional and creative. The following will consider each of these guiding principles in turn.

While spiritual exercises may be practiced by everyone, for the purpose of strategic discipleship, this ministry program will be focused on the Leadership Team members of the Great Exchange Covenant Church. This is a very specific subset of the GrX church community. These are adults and not youth or children. These are people who have become partners of GrX, which is the equivalent of church membership. Further, the Leadership Team members are individuals who have been elected by the wider church body to provide spiritual oversight for the whole church. Just as Jesus chose his twelve disciples to walk with him and learn from him, the Leadership Team members form a focused body of believers.

This is not to say that all future iterations of the practice of spiritual exercises will be limited to such a focused group of participants. Quite the contrary, a church-wide adoption of the practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest would be greatly welcomed and a sign of spiritual maturity across the larger community. The strategy

behind a focused participation group is to nurture and guide a small number of people to be successful. As the goodness of spiritual exercises is discovered and as real transformation takes place, others will see this and be drawn to explore this means of growth and change. It is more strategic to have high success with a few than to have tepid impact on many.

The ministry program will also be invitational. The practice of the spiritual exercises will be completely voluntary. Although the targeted group will be Leadership Team members, these members are under no obligation to participate. Like with physical exercise, coercion, guilt and obligation are poor motivators for spiritual exercise. Leadership Team members are elected to the Leadership Team. It is voluntary to be nominated and voluntary to accept the results of one's election to the team. In keeping with the voluntary nature of our Leadership Team, participation in the spiritual exercises will also be voluntary. Non-participation in the spiritual disciplines will not disqualify someone from serving as a duly elected member of the Leadership Team.

Instead, Leadership Team members will be invited to participate, in order to enhance their personal, spiritual growth and their capacities as leaders. When a group of people choose to pursue spiritual growth together for the sake of ministry, excitement, anticipation and eagerness occurs. Todd Hunter captures this well in writing about "...little bands of Christ-followers agreeing to go on the 'inner journey and outer journey' together. Those who journey inward together seek spiritual transformation into

Christlikeness. On the outward journey they seek to become the kind of people from whom deeds of goodness in service to others naturally flow.”¹

The ministry program will be intentional, containing specific topics and exercises in coordination with the ministry year. Without a clear, organized plan, the practice of spiritual exercises can become dissipated. Participants can become discouraged. Because the ministry year and the newly elected Leadership Team both begin in September, the practice of the spiritual exercises will also begin in September. Todd Hunter rightly instructs, “The [spiritual] disciplines should be practiced in a targeted fashion. It’s not good to start with a list of the disciplines and start practicing them randomly.”² This ministry program seeks to take five spiritual exercises and practice them in a targeted manner. There is a specific pathway with a specific group of people. The strategic intent behind specificity is the recognition that for our GrX church community, the practice of spiritual exercises will be something new. Having a clear pathway will help Leadership Team members to not become lost along this new journey.

The ministry program will also be creative. Because each person has a unique history and spiritual journey with God, the spiritual practices need to contain a measure of dynamic freedom and adaptability. Jesus reminds us, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27). People on the Leadership Team will have different modalities of learning. Leadership Team members will have different personalities. One may hear God’s voice through music while another experiences God closely through

¹ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 69.

² Ibid., 90.

nature. One may be well practiced in the discipline of silence while another may be entirely new to the idea. While the ministry program will be anchored in the spiritual exercises of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest, there will be the allowance for a level of creativity to how these exercises are actually practiced. For example, the exercise of study may take the form of reading for one participant, while it takes the form of listening for another. Additional expressions of each spiritual exercise are listed in the Appendices.

The program implementation will begin in conversation with the existing Leadership Team. Being charged with the spiritual oversight of the community, the Leadership Team needs to have the opportunity to discuss and consider the benefits and costs of this ministry program both individually and corporately. Individually, the adoption of this ministry program will create a more focused experience of discipleship in the Leadership Team. It will also add the practice of spiritual exercises and participation of Leadership Team members outside the monthly meetings. It will open up future Leadership Team members to a level of discipleship and intimacy which may make some feel exposed, vulnerable and possibly uncomfortable. It will also, however, create a specific pathway by which Leadership Team members can strengthen their relationship with God and connect more deeply with God, others and themselves.

Corporately, the cost will be a potentially longer Leadership Team meeting each month. Instruction and sharing will be incorporated into the Leadership Team meeting time. However, practice of the spiritual exercises may have unanticipated benefits which could make the Leadership Team more efficient with meetings. The practice of silence may help Leadership Team members listen more deeply to one another, thereby avoiding

misunderstandings and unnecessary conflict. The practice of solitude may create a deeper empathy for others, thereby making it easier to see another's point of view. The practice of prayer may open up the capacity to hear God's leading corporately and to be more easily united in ministry initiatives. The practice of rest may be the source of greater energy and creativity in quickly discovering solutions to problems.

If the current Leadership Team approves the ministry program, the next step in church-wide implementation is a conversation with the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee talks with all of the people who are potential candidates to be elected to the Leadership Team for the upcoming ministry year. The Nominating Committee will need to be briefed about the ministry program and the purpose behind the practice of spiritual exercises with the Leadership Team members. The Nominating Committee in turn will be tasked with briefly sharing about the ministry program with all potential Leadership Team nominees. If further questions or concerns arise, those may be directed toward the Lead Pastor or other Leadership Team members.

Church wide communication will be important to invite the GrX community to pray for the Leadership Team members. This communication will also be an opportunity to reiterate that one of the roles of Leadership Team members is the spiritual oversight of the whole church. The intentional discipleship of Leadership Team members expresses the vision of training and growth at the highest level of authority within the church community. The intentional practice of spiritual exercises also conveys the sense of Leadership Team members seeking to know God's voice and leading for the whole church body.

Personal, individual conversations with any in the GrX church community will also be welcomed. There may be potential Leadership Team members who have questions about spiritual exercises and may want to weigh the commitment to grow alongside the commitment to govern. There may be people who are not yet deeply invested in GrX, who may be intrigued as to this form of discipleship. There may be individuals who have had negative, past experiences with spiritual exercises who may feel wary about practicing them again.

After the election of the new Leadership Team, implementation will require a discussion with the Leadership Team members to invite them and to confirm their willingness to participate in the ministry program. The practice of spiritual exercises, like discipleship, is voluntary. Following Jesus is invitational. Leadership Team members will be invited to participate in this ministry program. The benefits of strengthening their relationship with God and connecting more deeply with God, others and themselves will be explained. Their participation will be eagerly sought as the ones charged with spiritual oversight. However, like following Jesus, the practice of spiritual exercises will not be ultimately beneficial if done under negative pressure or coercion.

Once the new Leadership Team is formed and the ministry year begins, the Leadership Team members who have agreed to the practice of spiritual disciplines will begin the ministry program. It will be important throughout the year to be vigilant in monitoring the successes and challenges of the participants. As with any new endeavor, there is likely to be a honeymoon period of initial excitement, eagerness and energy. There may be immediate gains found in solitude, as participants discover their own busyness and find a place of wholeness.

As the months continue, however, challenges and resistance to the spiritual practices may emerge. New habits and practices are difficult to maintain. It will be important to honestly share struggles and challenges among the Leadership Team members as well as authentic success. With gentle guidance, participants will be encouraged to renew their practice if they have abandoned it. A reminder of the vision to connect more deeply with God, others and ourselves will be the primary motivation for engaging the exercises. The goal is not the practices themselves, but rather, a stronger relationship with God, others and self. The monthly change of the spiritual practices will aid the participants in their journey. If one particular spiritual discipline seems unhelpful or particularly laborious, the following month will bring a new practice which can bring a renewed energy. The one who finds the spiritual practice of study too arduous would be hard pressed to say the same about the spiritual practice of rest.

The monthly Leadership Team meeting will provide a forum for regular monthly evaluation both of the program and of the individual participants. Within a community of trust and hope, struggles and failures can be shared openly alongside breakthroughs and growth. The community of the Leadership Team will encourage and remind participants that they are not alone in their journey. Through mutual sharing, participants will be able to assess for themselves whether or not they sense the Leadership Team as a whole is growing in spiritual maturity. In these regular monthly meetings, there may emerge new, creative ideas to enhance the practice of the disciplines through first-hand experience. As personal experiences are shared, the Leadership Team members can grow not only from their own experiences, but from the experiences of their fellow members as well.

After the completion of the program, a program assessment will be sought around the initial impact on the church community. This program assessment will be focused on the design and effectiveness of the program itself and be in contrast to the self-evaluations completed by individual Leadership Team members. The assessment of the program will be divided into two parts.

The first part of the program assessment will focus on the Leadership Team as a body and include the following questions. On a scale of one to ten, how valuable do you believe this ministry program is for the Leadership Team? What challenges or obstacles did the Leadership Team encounter when practicing spiritual exercises? Which spiritual exercise is most beneficial for the Leadership Team? Which is the least beneficial for the Leadership Team? Given the frequency and length of Leadership Team meetings, how did you feel about the amount of time devoted to spiritual exercises (sharing experiences and teaching the new practice)? The design of the ministry program introduces all of the ministry practices, then returns to those practices at a later month. Another approach would be to cover one spiritual practice for two consecutive months. Please comment on which approach you believe would be most beneficial to the Leadership Team. Do you think the practice of spiritual exercises by the Leadership Team helped the Leadership Team connect more with God, others and ourselves? If so, please share any specific examples.

The second part of the program assessment would cover reflection questions with the overall church in mind. Questions would include the following. What benefits do you believe are created for the wider GrX church by having the Leadership Team participate in spiritual exercises? If someone in the wider GrX church community asked you about

the key learnings from Leadership Team's the practice of spiritual exercises, how would you respond? Given the responsibility of spiritual oversight for the GrX church, do you believe the Leadership Team should continue to practice these spiritual exercises? Why or why not?

One of the dangers of elected Leadership Team members is embedded in the cultural and political landscape of elections. Elected public officials represent the wants and desires of their constituents. A danger is for elected Leadership Team members to also see themselves in similar light, as someone charged with representing a constituency within the church. This is not the role of a Leadership Team member. The Leadership Team member has spiritual oversight over the whole church. As such, they are listening to God and seeking God's voice on behalf of the entire community.

The practices of spiritual exercises are to strengthen the connection of each person to God, thereby enhancing their capacity to hear God's voice and sense God's leading. The Leadership Team members carry the double responsibility of listening for God's voice at both the individual level and the corporate level. God is at work both to transform the individual and the community. Trust in God's good leadership needs to be operative both in the individual and in the community.

Six months after the completion of the program, there will be a follow up program assessment for the Leadership Team to explore the ongoing impact on the church community. This follow up assessment will include the following questions. What spiritual practices are collectively being practiced by the Leadership Team? If no practices are being exercised, what do Leadership Team members believe to be the cause of this? How would you assess and describe the present state of the Leadership Team?

Do you feel like the Leadership team is as connected, more connected or less connected to God than six months ago? Please explain your sense of connectedness between the Leadership Team and God. What, if any, spiritual practices would be helpful for the Leadership Team to take up from now until the end of the ministry year in August?

The goals of the program assessments and the individual self-evaluations six months following the program are to encourage Leadership Team members in their spiritual growth and discipleship. It will be important to be mindful of feelings of discouragement. Leadership Team members may no longer be practicing any form of spiritual exercises six months after the program. In the spirit of being focused, invitational, intentional and creative, these assessments and evaluations need to lead to specific, discipleship conversations. Mutual encouragement and accountability within the Leadership Team may be re-engaged if such community support is authentically welcomed.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Spiritual maturity is a journey that takes a lifetime. The practice of spiritual disciplines is the vehicle that can aid us on that journey. Given the culture of Silicon Valley and the community of people who call GrX their church home, the most significant benefit of a program to practice spiritual exercises is that we actually interrupt our hectic and worry-filled pace of life in order to practice a new way of being. In practicing a new way to approaching life, we come into a new encounter with God, others and ourselves.

For the Leadership Team members in the GrX community, this ministry program may be a first step on the journey of spiritual practice. This first step is exciting and full of possibilities. At the same time, this ministry program also contains limitations. The benefits and limitations of this ministry program will be explored, along with some possibilities for the expansion of this initial foray into the spiritual exercises.

One of the benefits of this ministry program is the strategic introduction of the five spiritual practices. Solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest are vital spiritual exercises seen in Scripture and practiced by Christians through church history. The targeted introduction of these practices will help focus participants as they navigate spiritual exercises for the first time. The intentional movement from solitude and silence to prayer and study is a movement from distraction to attention and from dissipation to focus.

A second benefit is community. This ministry program is designed for the spiritual practices to be done with others. The GrX Leadership Team, with its annual cycle, creates an ideal community for discipleship and spiritual formation through regular

gatherings, mutual support, discussion and accountability. A subtle distinction must be recognized about accountability. Participants will be asked to be accountable rather than to have the group hold them accountable. By being accountable themselves, each person is accountable to their own commitment to practice. The group becomes a safe place wherein to give account, speaking of one's own successes and struggles. By contrast, having the group hold individuals accountable to spiritual practice creates a subtle danger. If the group holds individuals accountable, then the responsibility for the practices gets shifted to the group. It is far too easy in this understanding of accountability to avoid personal responsibility, fall into blame shifting and ultimately sabotage one's own spiritual growth and maturity. It is essential for the Leadership Team as a community to actively and lovingly listening. In listening, the space is created for each Leadership Team member to be accountable. The practice of silence is an aid to this form of listening with love.

A third benefit is the growth of each Leadership Team member. In discussing Christian leadership, Todd Hunter notes, "anyone who seeks to be a servant leader must begin an inward journey of the transformation of heart, will, mind, and soul. Interior renovation is the only process that produces genuine, consistent servant leaders."¹ The spiritual practices will lead participants in this inward journey and renovation of heart, will, mind and soul. Given that the mandate of the Leadership Team is to provide spiritual oversight for the church community, Leadership Team members will have added

¹ Hunter, *Our Character at Work*, 15.

motivation to participate in their own, personal spiritual transformation for the sake of the wider community.

A fourth benefit can be found in the growth and maturity of the wider church community. As our Leadership Team is transformed by God, there exists the possibility that our whole church will be transformed. As our Leadership Team more clearly connects with God and listens to God's voice, our church gains the benefit of being more clearly led by God's Spirit than by human personality. As the Leadership Team comes into deeper relationship with God, our church can be drawn deeper into God's heart together. Author Reggie McNeal emphasizes the importance of a church hearing God's voice and church leaders being transformed as he observes,

If God's people are to be once again captured by his heart for them, they are going to have to be in communion with him to hear his voice. Until church leaders come to their senses, they will continue to pass our methodological pabulum to their followers as a drug to dull their pain and to anesthetize their spiritual yearnings for more vibrancy than they currently experience. We will not have renewed congregations and ministries until we have renewed leaders."²

The body of Christ is not to be a place of insipid teaching and lifeless rule following, but rather, one of authentic, life-transforming, generous engagement. This will require leadership with an active commitment to come into close proximity with the Living God, to hear God's voice and to courageously live in the assurance of God's faithfulness.

The intentionality of the ministry design also gives rise to a number of limitations. While it is strategic to only introduce five spiritual practices, this program excludes many other spiritual practices that would prove beneficial for the GrX community. For

² Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 143.

example, the spiritual exercises of reading Scripture, confession, service, worship, giving and fasting are also all valuable practices to explore. There is a wide variety of spiritual practices that lead to greater spiritual growth, intimacy with God, relational maturity and self-understanding.

In particular, fasting would be a spiritual practice that would immediately find resonance with our GrX community. While fasting from food is beneficial, a form of intentional restraint in the culture of Silicon Valley would be to fast from technology. Options for this type of fast would be to cease from email, social media or from engaging in any form of a digital screen. Electronic devices create distraction and disconnection from those around us. Countless hours are lost surfing the internet and watching videos. A digital fast limits our exposure to technology and to the things vying for our attention. Our attention can then be reoriented and refocused on God, others and our inner life.

A second limitation is one of depth. Over the course of the ministry program, each of the five spiritual exercises is only practiced for two months. Any one of these spiritual exercises could be practiced daily for a year, with much benefit.

A third limitation is one of length. The overall time commitment of one year is limiting. The ministry program could easily be expanded to a two-year plan, coinciding with the two-year term of a Leadership Team member. The program could be redesigned to either include additional spiritual practices or revisit these five practices in greater depth.

A fourth limitation is found in the limited targeted group of the Leadership Team. Possible expansions are to offer this ministry program to past Leadership Team members and to church staff. Past Leadership Team members continue to be key volunteer leaders

in the life of GrX church. These former Leadership Team members are presently serving as KidZone teachers for our children and Life Group facilitators for our adults. These are critical discipleship roles. For those involved with the formation of children and adults, it would be strategic to invest in their spiritual formation through the intentional practice of spiritual exercises.

The GrX church staff is an additional and critical group within our church who would benefit from a guided introduction to the spiritual exercises. While the Leadership Team is charged with the oversight and overall governance of the church, the church staff is charged with the execution of ministry initiatives. The staff of GrX plays a vital role in loving people and guiding people toward the God who loves them. The staff leads the programmatic ministry of the church, but also lives out a vibrant witness to the love of God through recognizing that people matter more than programs. The staff team is marked by emotional maturity, creativity, generosity, servant-heartedness and joy. Ministry initiatives emerge from times of prayer and group planning. Spiritual exercises intended to connect us more deeply with God and others would only enhance the staff's leadership.

A final expansion is to offer this ministry program not only to adults, but to youth and children as well. The problem of chronic busyness and over-scheduling is an issue for both adults and young people in our church. Families could be taught to practice the spiritual exercises at home together. Portions of any given weekend could be devoted to solitude, silence, study, prayer and rest, transforming our homes from places of chaos into places of sacred worship, reconnection and peace.

The underlying hypothesis of this ministry program is that the spiritual practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest actually can and do help us more deeply connect with God, others and ourselves. Through the practices of spiritual exercises, our relationship with God, others and ourselves will become strengthened. Identifying specific ways the exercises can do this will encourage us along the journey and help us to know we are on the right road.

In solitude, we draw away from others. Initially, we find ourselves alone, with only ourselves. It is at this point that self-awareness and self-reflection begin to emerge. Without the distraction of other people or their perceptions of us, we are released to discover the state of our own being. In our Silicon Valley culture, one anticipated self-discovery may be weariness. Other self-discoveries may be worry, anxiety, fear or anger. There may also be joy, thanksgiving and gratitude. In solitude, we become aware of ourselves. Solitude as a spiritual practice can move from self-awareness into awareness of God and others. In the absence of others, we begin to become aware that we are not alone. Loneliness is slowly replaced by a growing and profound sense of the God's presence. We discover that in God, we are never truly alone. The absence of others also creates a longing and gratitude for human relationships. In solitude, thankfulness for human friendship emerges. In this way, the practice of solitude draws us into deeper fellowship and connection with others. Our eventual reunion with friends and family after a period of solitude is filled with a deeper gratitude for the gift of human companionship.

Silence is the practice of quieting the external and internal noise that distracts us. In solitude, we first come away from the noise of the world and experience an external silence. The practice of silence then invites us to cease from talking. The challenge is to

give up all that comes with the use of our voices. In silence we release control. In silence we release defensiveness. In silence we yield power. With the external noise of our own voice silenced, we then finally come to the challenge of practicing an internal silence of the mind and heart. This internal silence may take several hours of struggle. Worries, fears, unfinished tasks and a multitude of other thoughts will distract us. When finally all of these can be laid aside, internal silence will be found. In the space of internal silence, God's voice can begin to be heard. Gentle communion with God begins to take place in the heart, soul and mind. We discover beyond all of our doing, we are loved, forgiven and embraced by God. We come into greater awareness of ourselves. We discover we are exceedingly valued and exceedingly unworthy to receive such value. We also discover that in God, others are under this same gracious paradox. Our empathy, compassion and patience for others grows as we discover in silence God's compassion and patience towards us.

The practice of prayer emerges from silence. In prayer, we come to a place of waiting on God and listening. Solitude and silence have quieted the superfluous chattiness of prayer that sometimes more often resemble a list of needs than a conversation with the living God. We come to a place of being in God's presence that can move us beyond words. Kirk Byron Jones writes,

I understand prayer to be purposeful communion with God involving my verbal expressions—but even more deeply the nonverbal expressions of my heart, and deeper still, paying attention to the silence. My Sabbath prayer life is less about my own words and more about my being empty, open, and receptive. Someone has said that one of the great maladies of our time is verbal intoxication. As wonderful as they are, too many words, especially those rendered within a short span of time, can be numbing. Nowhere is wordiness more of a liability than in

our prayer lives. In my prayer life, particularly in my Sabbath prayer life, I am committed to allowing for more empty spaces, for more pauses.³

In prayer, we hear how much God loves and treasures us. In prayer we hear the invitation to cease from striving. In prayer we hear God's release and forgiveness from past brokenness. These are prayers that connect us more with ourselves and with God. In prayer we are also invited into more authentic relationship with others. God brings others to mind and invites us to consider their journeys. In prayer God show us how others are seen through the eyes of Christ. In prayer, we discover a common humanity and a common need for grace.

The spiritual practice of study further focuses our hearts and minds. Through study, we learn the art of paying attention. In study, we come into a posture of humility before the subject of study, to receive illumination, understanding and insight. Through the practice of study, we experience the challenge of uncertainty and the euphoria of discovery. Sometimes this discovery is done after careful search. At other times, this discovery is experienced surprisingly and spontaneously. In Scripture we see both forms of discovery. The wise men from the east discovered Jesus after carefully studying the stars, inquiring of Herod and traveling to Bethlehem (Mt 2:11). Mary discovers the resurrected Christ spontaneously and by surprise (Jn 20:16). In the practice of study, the discovery of an answer to a question is a gift that comes to us. While at times, study entails the hard work of focusing attention, illumination is an experience of grace.

³ Jones, *Rest in the Storm*, 45.

In the study of Scripture, we come humbly before God's Word, wondering with expectation, how God will teach us. We discover new insights about God and humanity. The study of the God of love draws us into a deeper love for others. The study of the God of forgiveness draws us into a deeper forgiveness for others. The study of the God of compassion draws us into a deeper compassion for others. And in all of this, we discover that God's love, forgiveness and compassion is also for each one of us.

In the spiritual practice of rest, we cease from our various forms of work. We cease from consumerism, competition and control. We pause from busyness, sleeplessness and anxiousness, to discover a restful, peaceful assurance in God. Intentional rest gives freedom from striving, from things and from people. The practice of rest in God gives freedom from all else that may exert power over us. In turn, as we are freed from the burdens of culture and the expectations of others. The practice of rest leads us to God, the source of true rest for our souls. We can creatively take up simple activities to aid us in our rest. As author Lynne Baab observes,

On the sabbath we are invited to clear away the distractions of our lives so we can rest in God and experience his grace in a new way. We may need to create some simple structures to experience true spiritual rest in God's presence. But if we give ourselves too many things to do, the sabbath becomes a legalistic and burdensome duty. The sabbath is more than doing nothing all day. However, doing nothing of any particular importance on the sabbath has, over the course of many years, taught me more about God's grace than anything else in my life. So we need to seek a delicate balance in our Sabbath observance: lots of rest and a few habits to nurture intimacy with God and others.⁴

⁴ Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 72.

Sabbath rest activities include worship, spending time in nature, enjoying a leisurely meal with others, writing a letter by hand and waking up slowly from sleep in a spirit of gratitude for all God has provided. The practice of rest reminds us that we are human and are not machines. In rest, we come into deeper connection with ourselves, our limits and our need for renewal and restoration. In community, the practice of rest draws us to see not only our own humanity, but also the humanity of others. The practice of rest disrupts the false narrative that human worth is synonymous with human performance. In rest, we begin to see the humanity of others above their productivity and functionality. The practice of rest is marked by less doing and more being.

The spiritual practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest as outlined in this ministry program are only a beginning point. The strategic identification of the Leadership Team of Great Exchange Covenant Church is only the starting place within the community to practice spiritual exercises. There is great potential to expand this ministry program to include more spiritual practices, a longer time frame and additional groups of people from the church.

However, a word of caution needs to be noted here. There may arise the temptation to turn this ministry plan into a large-scale production for the entire church. If creating a large, extensive program becomes the primary goal, the vision of strengthening our relationship with God, others and ourselves may quickly become lost. In trying to include more participants too quickly, the expansion of the program could become more important than the people within the program. To avoid this unhelpful outcome, it is essential to vigilantly guard the primary goal of this ministry, to more deeply connect

with God, others and ourselves, even if it means only a handful of people practice these exercises each year.

The goal is not to teach a series of new behaviors. The goal is spiritual transformation through profound connection with God. In speaking about leadership, Todd Hunter accurately recognizes,

There is a consistency between what is most real inside us... and the behaviors and words that leak out under enough pressure. This is why external approaches to changing one's leadership style will not work. We can't unclog the arteries of our hearts by taking a shower.... The real problem is the clogged and dirty places of our hearts. To cleanse and heal our hearts takes a different strategy. Most people, not just leaders, try to cover their spiritual, emotional, and psychological deadness by cleaning their exterior. This isn't effective.... This reveals the most difficult truth on the inner journey toward servant leadership: our *outward* actions and words are reliable indicators of what exists within.”⁵

The spiritual practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest are intended to transform our inner being. Through these exercises, we will be drawn into more authentic and intimate awareness and connection with God, others and ourselves, becoming more of what God intends for us to be.

The overly busy, anxious, competitive culture of Silicon Valley can lead to dissipation and fragmentation. By giving ourselves to a crushing work week and running from one activity to the next, we increasingly become disconnected from God, from others and from ourselves. Disconnection leads to isolation. Isolation leads to disorientation. The problem is living a life that is disconnected and lost with respect to God, others and our own souls.

⁵ Todd Hunter, *Our Character at Work* (City: Publisher, date), 20-21.

The solution is found, not in doing more, but in doing less. The solution to excessive activity is learning to “be still and know” that God is God (Ps 46:10). The spiritual practices of solitude, silence, prayer, study and rest can bring us into a deep stillness that leads to knowing God, others and ourselves more completely. In time, we will be transformed into living as a loving, non-anxious presence and living from a profound sense of God’s goodness and mystery. C.S. Lewis captures this mystery beautifully in his poem entitled, “Prayer.”

Master, they say that when I seem
To be in speech with you,
Since you make no replies, it’s all a dream
--One talker aping two.

They are half right, but not as they
Imagine; rather, I
Seek in myself the things I meant to say,
And lo! the wells are dry.

Then, seeing me empty, you forsake
The Listener’s role, and through
My dead lips breathe and into utterance wake
The thoughts I never knew.

And thus you neither need reply
Nor can; thus, while we seem
Two talking, thou art One forever, and I
No dreamer, but thy dream.⁶

The spiritual practices are a gift. They create space in our lives to listen, to receive and to know. They are a means of grace. Through the spiritual practices, we discover the loving God who is waiting to reconnect with us. We discover the blessing of others. And we discover ourselves. The spiritual practices are an invitation to be found.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Poems* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), 122-123.

APPENDICES

Silicon Valley Home Prices¹

BAY AREA HOMEBUYERS' BURDEN: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Give or take a few bucks, the median 20 percent down payment on a house in the San Jose metro area is equal to the median nationwide value of an entire house. Here's how San Jose buyers stack up against other buyers when cobbling together a down payment.

Metro area	Zillow home value index	Median 20% down payment	Median annual income	Percent of annual income required for down payment
San Jose*	\$961,600	\$192,320	\$105,455	182%
San Francisco**	\$824,600	\$164,920	\$91,777	180%
Los Angeles	\$590,000	\$118,000	\$64,806	182%
San Diego	\$526,500	\$105,300	\$69,374	152%
Seattle	\$412,600	\$82,520	\$77,809	106%
Boston	\$408,400	\$81,680	\$80,846	101%
New York/northern New Jersey	\$400,500	\$80,100	\$70,502	114%
Washington, D.C.	\$378,000	\$75,600	\$95,176	79%
Denver	\$352,800	\$70,560	\$72,470	97%
Portland, Ore.	\$351,800	\$70,360	\$66,047	107%
United States	\$192,500	\$38,500	\$57,397	67%

*Includes Santa Clara and San Benito counties

**Includes San Francisco, San Mateo, Alameda, Contra Costa and Marin counties

Source: Zillow

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¹ Richard Scheinin, "A Silicon Valley Down Payment Could Buy You an Entire House in Much of the U.S.," The Mercury News (January 16, 2017, Updated: March 1, 2017) under "Business Real Estate," <http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/01/16/a-silicon-valley-down-payment-could-buy-you-an-entire-house-in-much-of-the-u-s/> (accessed November 22, 2017).

**Length of Time Employees Are Staying
at the Ten Biggest Technology Companies²**

Facebook	2.02 years
Google	1.90 years
Oracle	1.89 years
Apple:	1.85 years
Amazon	1.84 years
Twitter	1.83 years
Microsoft	1.81 years
Airbnb	1.64 years
Snap Inc.	1.62 years
Uber	1.23 years

² Becky Peterson, “Travis Kalanick lasted in his role for 6.5 years — five times longer than the average Uber employee,” Business Insider (August 20, 2017) under “Tech Insider,” <http://www.businessinsider.com/employee-retention-rate-top-tech-companies-2017-8> (accessed November 27, 2017)

Behavioral Covenant

For The Leadership Team at Great Exchange Covenant Church

Guidelines for Loving Relationships and Values to Guide Our Interaction

In our ministry and communications as Leadership Team servant-leaders, we realize that at times there can be conflict, disagreements, and misunderstandings. Therefore, we covenant together in these guidelines to help us foster loving relationships, using these values as a guide for our ministry at GrX.

1. We promise to value each other as gifts from God and will always seek to be in a harmonious and respectful relationship with each other. (John 13:34, Romans 12:10)

- *John 13:34 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*
- *Romans 12:10 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. (A) Honor one another above yourselves.*

2. We promise to value, as a team, the ministry of the GrX Staff under the leadership of the Lead Pastor. (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thess. 5:13)

- *Hebrews 13:17 17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
- *1 Thessalonians 5:13 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.*

3. We promise to make our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, to express criticism and negative feelings with wisdom--first, to the person, not to others, and seek reconciliation as far as possible. (Romans 12:18, 2 Cor. 10:5)

- *Romans 12:18 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*
- *Corinthians 10:5 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

4. We promise to honor confidentiality in both personal and professional matters, especially when we may possess information privy only to the Leadership Team. (Prov. 12:18)

- *Proverbs 12:18 18 Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

5. We commit to process major strategies and decisions as a team, allowing for emergency situations to be addressed by email or phone. (Isa. 1:18, Eph. 4:3)

- *Isaiah 1:18 18 “Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*
- *Ephesians 4:3 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

6. We accept disagreement and conflict as normal and natural. In this regard, we will seek to deal constructively with disagreements or conflicts by practicing (Matthew 18:15-17 and Matthew 5:23)

- *Matthew 18:15-17 15 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*
- *Matthew 5:23-24 23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

7. We promise to lead by following the example of Christ. (1 Cor.11:1, Titus 2:7)

- *1 Corinthians 11:1 11 1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*
- *Titus 2:7-8 7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness 8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

8. We promise to be good stewards of our churches’ resources and to always be accountable for our decisions involving the same.

9. We, as those forgiven by God, seek also to be a forgiving team, offering God’s forgiveness to one another and others with whom we have opportunity to share the forgiving nature of Christ. (Col. 3:13)

- *Colossians 3:13 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

10. We promise to support one another and the ongoing work of our churches’ mission through prayer. (Col. 4:2)

- *Colossians 4:2 2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*

Additional Ideas for Spiritual Practice

With each of the following practices, notice what God is revealing about: God, others and yourself.

Solitude

1. Posture
 - a. Be in solitude and take on different physical postures such as kneeling, laying prone, sitting on the floor, resting in a chair, etc. Note what different posture evoke in you.
2. Inner Solitude
 - a. Choose to cultivate inner solitude by practicing in a well populated area such as a coffee shop or a shopping mall. Journal about your experience.

Silence

1. Defensiveness
 - a. Practice silence immediately when you are accused or blamed for something. Respond in love and humility.
2. Suffering
 - a. Endure a temporary trial in silence, studying how Christ was silent before Pilate. (This is not to be practiced in situations of abuse.)
3. Service
 - a. Do something for the benefit of someone else and practice silence by not telling anyone about it. Let your act of compassion be an act of worship to God.

Prayer

1. Psalm 46:10 – “Be still and know that I am God.”
 - a. Pray the opening words of Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God.”
 - b. Pause to listen to God.
 - c. After some time, pray the phrase again, but omit the last word.
 - d. Again pause to listen
 - e. Pray the phrase again, but omit the last two words.
 - f. Continue this pattern of listening and praying, omitting words, until your final prayer is “Be.”
2. Repetition
 - a. Take a short phrase and slowly repeat it, listening for God’s leading.
 - b. Potential phrases to pray are:
 - i. “Come Lord Jesus.”
 - ii. “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me”
 - iii. “Jesus, remember me.”
3. Intercession
 - a. Pray and journal the blessings and needs of those in your community.

4. Gratitude
 - a. Write your prayers, listing the God's blessings in your life and anything you are thankful for.

Study

1. Object from Nature
 - a. Study an object from nature such as a leaf, a tree or a seashell.
 - b. Draw the object as a form of study. Continue drawing additional copies of the object, with each subsequent copy containing more detail and accuracy, leading to drawing the object from memory.
2. Writing
 - a. Write a thoughtful review on a book, film, musical, poem or passage from Scripture. A thoughtful review will require focused study of the subject material. After completing the first draft of your review, rewrite your draft, and then share it with someone.

Rest

1. Creating
 - a. Find rest through creativity. Painting, gardening, woodworking, creative writing, playing music and cooking can all be expressions of restful creativity.
2. Playing
 - a. Rest from work and allow your mind to rest by taking time to play. Waste time with someone, laugh and rest in God's love for you without thought of your productivity.

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